GREAT ASIATIC MYSTERIES



FIRE-WALKING CEREMONIAL AT THE THAIPUSAN FESTIVAL

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By

CHARLES LOW

With Eighteen Half-tone Illustrations

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Mysteries of Oriental Magic	11
II.	Human Animals of Asia	36
III.	The Secret Societies of the East	52
IV.	Where was the Garden of Eden?	70
V.	Hidden Tribes of Asia	84
VI.	Tibet—A Land Apart	107
VII.	The Forbidden City of Peking	130
VIII.	Enigmas of Islam and the Near East	141
IX.	Mysteries of the Elephants	164
X.	Java's Mysterious Valley of Death	178
XI.	The Riddle of Everest	184
XII.	The Inscrutable City of Angkor Thom	195
XIII.	The Wandering Lake of the Gobi	213
XIV.	Conjuring in Eastern Lands	225
XV.	Phantom Ships	238
XVI.	Mysteries of Asiatic Seas	248
XVII.	The Mystery of the Schooner "Nesta"	265
	Bibliography	277

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
FIRE-WALKING CEREMONIAL AT THE THAIPUSAN FESTIVAL	*Frontispiece*
A SNAKE-CHARMER WITH HIS COBRA	32
A SHINTO PRIEST OFFERING WINE TO THE GODS	32
AN INDIAN FAKIR	33
SHINTO PRIESTS	64
A PERSIAN DERVISH	65
BRONZE DRAGON AT THE SUMMER PALACE, PEKING	96
ANGKOR VAT	97
THE ALTAR OF HEAVEN, PEKING	97
MECCA. THE MOSQUE WITH KAABA AND PULPIT AT TIME OF PRAYER	136
THE LAST 2000 FEET ON EVEREST	137
FROM 28,200 FEET ON EVEREST, LOOKING NORTH	168
CARRYING STORES UP THE EAST RONGBUK GLACIER, EVEREST	169
A NAGA ON THE TEMPLE AT ANGKOR	208
CARVINGS ON THE TEMPLE AT ANGKOR	209
NOMADS OF THE GOBI	240
TYPICAL ORIENTAL CONJURERS	241

AUTHOR'S NOTE

TRUTH may often be stranger than fiction, but it is seldom as artistic. Reality is inconsequent, inconsistent, and inconclusive, and it follows that, if the purpose of purveyors of mystery be solely to entertain, the writer of fiction must invariably score heavily over him who sticks to actual facts.

If the following pages have any merit at all, it lies in the fact that their entire contents consist of plain, unvarnished fact.

In the accumulation of a collection of real-life facts and happenings such as this, it is, of course, not always possible to adduce evidence that is completely circumstantial, in support of their actuality. But although, for necessary reasons, the full evidence has not in every case been submitted to the reader, the writer has included no statement of the genuineness of which he has not entirely satisfied himself.

For every instance, indeed, which he has permitted himself to include in this book, he has rejected at least three as not proven.

If, however, in spite of this care, any errors have crept in unawares, it is hoped that the reader will regard them with the eye of tolerance, remembering that: "No human being is without error."

GREAT ASIATIC MYSTERIES

CHAPTER I

MYSTERIES OF ORIENTAL MAGIC

THIS is a matter-of-fact age. Nothing happens, say the scientists, but in obedience to recognised and logical laws of nature; and—to their credit be it said—it is seldom that the plain, unscientific man-in-the-street can stump them with a why or a wherefore.

The universe, which offered to the minds of our long-forgotten ancestors so many lovely and terrible mysteries, has been analysed, classified, tabulated, and reduced to a formula sufficiently simple to be intelligible even between the covers of a child's school-book. And few people, one imagines, will be found but will count this clarification and rationalisation of the world in which we live a matter for satisfaction. For knowledge is power, and the truth is always worth having.

Twentieth-century man no longer offers blood sacrifice to the Corn Spirit in attempts to ensure good harvests. He knows exactly why wheat grows and why it fails to do so; he has discovered the superior efficacy of nitrates over the sprinkled blood of a slaughtered goat, and so his crops prosper and his spirit has won freedom from the degrading fetters of barbarism and superstition.

There is, however, an obverse side to the medal.

Shorn of the last of its mysteries, life too often assumes an arid and humdrum aspect, very apt to have a fatally devitalising effect on spirits which are left with no other command but to live. To express the matter in its lowest terms, Man has need of a salting of mystery to give life savour, and to keep him from the folly of believing himself less than he is and that he knows more than he does know.

It is out of a search for what is left of genuine mystery in the world of to-day that the following pages have come to be written.

Light comes from the East, in the figurative as well as the literal sense, and the present-day seeker after authentic mystery turns his face eastwards as instinctively as did his sun-worshipping forerunners.

The " mysterious East " is a phrase so well-worn now that the once keen edge of its expressiveness has become dulled with over-use. Nevertheless it remains a fact that among the distant and diverse countries of Asia, ancient in civilisations when the Western world was still the unchallenged province of huge and uncouth animals, there are indeed more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in Occidental philosophies.

The East is so conveniently far away, the sceptical European may object ; it is easy for the traveller to bring back wonders from lands which his listeners have never seen and are unlikely ever to visit. The following incidents however, which took place no further afield than the Isle of Man, and which yet constitute as inexplicable a mystery of Asia as can well be imagined, are hardly open to this objection.

The facts of this extraordinary case were revealed some years ago by Mr. Gledhill Hallas, a well-known citizen of Nottingham, in whose reliability as a witness

there is every reason to believe. They were investigated by him while on holiday in the Isle of Man in 1902.

It appears that many years ago a man named Edward Kelly emigrated from the Island to Australia, where he became a successful contractor. In the summer of 1902, this man returned to visit his brother William Kelly, who at that time was coxswain of the Port St. Mary lifeboat.

Among other presents to his brother, Edward Kelly brought with him a very fine native bow, some arrows, and a spear, which had been given to him in Australia by a sailor whom he knew. This sailor had been extremely anxious to get rid of the bow which, he strongly asserted, was possessed of a devil. Edward Kelly was fully convinced that his nautical friend implicitly believed his own statements concerning the weapon, though he himself laughed at the notion as ridiculous.

Many extraordinary incidents connected with the bow were related in Australia, though Kelly had no proof of these, and my informant made no pretence to vouch for them. It is necessary to explain, however, that the bow was said to have belonged originally to a chief of one of the native tribes inhabiting the Trobriand Islands, off the northern coast of British New Guinea. It had been a favourite weapon of the chief, and had either been secretly stolen or forcibly taken from him by British sailors. In consequence of this, a kind of British tabu had been solemnly placed upon the bow by the tribe's medicine man, and a *puripuri*, or curse, laid on whoever should hold it.

However all that may be, William Kelly of Port St. Mary and all the members of his family can, or could

(I do not know how many of them are alive now), bear testimony to the following as absolute facts.

The chief's bow was hung on a picture nail above the piano in the front sitting-room, where Mr. Hallas himself saw it. From the day when it was hung on the wall the room became "haunted"—I know of no word which suitably describes the phenomena observed there.

Startling and unaccountable noises, weird whisperings, footsteps, and shadows kept the family in a continual state of alarm, though they tried to pass everything off as a joke. "The old chief wants his bow," they told each other smilingly. "Something is going to happen in New Guinea, and the chief wants his bow."

But the intimations that the chief wanted his bow were soon to assume more practical form. One evening in December, 1902—and the date is important—while William Kelly's daughter was playing the piano, the bow suddenly sprang from the wall and flew into the middle of the floor.

A variety of circumstances, of course, might have caused the weapon to fall, but it is difficult to imagine what the cause could be or how it came about that the bow received sufficient impetus to spring right into the middle of the room.

Assuring himself that he would prevent a similar accident occurring again, Kelly attached the bow to a stout nail with a piece of copper bell-wire. No breath of wind, no sudden jar or ordinary accident could possibly bring down the weapon again. A man could hang on wire and nail without displacing or affecting them in the slightest way.

But still the savage chief, in his far-away isle, called

ersistently for his bow—or so it seemed to the matter-
-fact little family in Port St. Mary, who were unable
disguise any longer the facts of the case.

It was not only a curious but a serious matter; for, few days later, when every person in the house was ting in the back room, a violent commotion was ard in the front sitting-room, which was unoccupied id in darkness. Kelly immediately procured a light id led the way into the haunted apartment. The bow y on the floor as before, without a scratch. The stout pper wire hung in shreds, but nothing else had been erfered with.

There was no indication of any sort of disturbance, and thing which could explain the extraordinary noise family had heard. What power or influence had en extended to wrench the bow from the wire—tened to a great nail with a sailor's dexterity—s utterly inconceivable.

These facts, incredible as they seem, are indisputable. ey were made known to friends of the Kellys at the e, and accepted without hesitation, because no one ld doubt the solemn assertion of all the members of a ily held in high esteem locally.

Whether the bow was "possessed of a devil"—as the or believed—or not, Kelly determined to have ther trial of strength with it before admitting defeat. therefore drove two more nails into the wall, one each end of the bow, besides the one in the middle t, and fastened it with copper wire at these three nts as securely as his ingenuity could devise.

very night doors and windows were carefully nded to, and every precaution was taken to keep any practical joker. It was quite impossible for one to gain entrance to the house without leaving

positive evidence of his intrusion. But still the chief called peremptorily for his bow.

Day after day and night after night the weird noises continued, and the family became more and more alarmed. Then, early one morning, some days after the bow had been re-hung, a terrific crash was heard, and in desperation the Kellys rushed downstairs, expecting to find everything in the haunted room smashed to atoms.

To their intense surprise, absolutely nothing whatever had been moved or injured in the slightest manner; but the bow was lying on the floor in the centre of the room as before, while the wire hung in shreds from the nails, every thread broken, apparently by some superhuman force.

Thereupon Kelly acknowledged his impotence; he simply hung the bow on its nails and left it to take its own course. And now comes a curious point. From that day the bow gave no more trouble, and was resting peacefully in its place when Mr. Hallas saw it, several years after the events described.

William Kelly was not appointed coxswain of the Port St. Mary lifeboat without good reason, for he was a brave and intelligent man. He was convinced that sooner or later some link in the chain of unaccountable events connected with the chief's bow would come to light, which would furnish some explanation of the mysterious phenomena he and his family had witnessed.

Day by day he closely scanned the newspapers, and a fortnight after the last scene in which the bow had played so conspicuous a part there appeared in the London *Times* of December 31st, 1902, a Reuter's telegram from Sydney stating that a conflict had taken place between

some tribes of New Guinea, and that many natives had been killed, a disastrous drought having caused them to revert to cannibalism.

The chain of evidence was still far from complete, but Kelly was perfectly satisfied in his own mind that the owner of the bow had been killed on the day when the weapon had been so violently wrenched from its nails in his house.

One more relative piece of information is, however, available. Curiosity impelled Mr. Hallas to pursue the matter further. He obtained a copy of the annual report of the Administrator of British New Guinea, and in it found a statement that in November, 1902, a tribal fight which had been simmering for years broke out on Kitawa Island, one of the Trobriand Group, between the Larena and the Kumageya tribes. Manaiea, chief of Larena, claimed chieftainship of Kumageya also—hence the trouble.

A force of Government police had been sent to quell the outbreak, and Chief Manaiea had been captured. It was while he was in custody and deprived of his weapons—in December, 1902—that the mysterious force was exercised on the bow in William Kelly's house in the far-away Isle of Man. That much is certain ; so that, although it cannot be proved, of course, that the weapon actually belonged to Manaiea, the inference is obvious.

Unfortunately, the report does not record whether the chief was condemned to death or not, and the Colonial Office has no further information. The report does mention, however, that " witchcraft and sorcery play a very prominent part in the lives of the natives of these islands "—a fact which Kelly and his family, at all events, are quite prepared to believe.

Next to the primitive and universal passions of love, hate, jealousy, and so on, religion is probably the most productive source of mysterious manifestations throughout Asia. The performances of ardent devotees of the innumerable religious cults to be found cheek by jowl all over the East provide many mysteries which have completely defeated the investigations of modern science.

Such peculiar forms of devotion as sitting or lying on a bed composed entirely of needle-sharp iron spikes, of swinging for hours head downwards over a hot fire, or of being whirled through the air from a tall pole, suspended on a rope by means of an iron hook pushed through the flesh and muscles of the back, may possibly be explained by the use of drugs to deaden sensibility, or even to a power of mental concentration capable of obliterating bodily sensations. But it is difficult to explain how human flesh and blood survives the treatment to which many devotees of Asiatic religions subject it.

There are, for example, various Asiatic rites, of a more or less religious significance, of which sorcery seems absolutely the only explanation.

The extremely ancient rite of fire-walking offers an obvious example. This practice—of which in many cases even the purpose remains obscure, though in some cases it is almost certainly a fertility rite, while in others it is performed as an act of faith—is widespread throughout the world. Traces of its survival in our own country, even, exist in the custom of jumping through bonfires in country places on midsummer night. It is practised in Bulgaria, New Zealand, and among the South Sea Islands ; but it is commonest of all in Asia.

A remarkable example of this unaccountable rite is the Shinto ceremony of the Shinshukyo, a religious sect

of Japan. This ceremony takes place twice a year, in April and September, in a small and insignificant temple in Kanda, one of the poorest districts of Tokio.

A long and tedious service lasting over four hours precedes the actual fire-walking—a service of invocation to the god Ontaké to cast out the "soul" of the fire, and thus make manifest his power to his worshippers. After long, formal prayer and food offerings to the god, made by the chief priest and his attendants, gorgeously attired in robes of white and purple, green, gold, and scarlet, the devotees go through a lengthy ritual of purification, and at last are ready for the final act of this dramatic ceremony.

A bed of charcoal, 18 feet long by 5 or 6 feet wide, has been lit some three hours previously, and is now a red-hot, glowing mass. The courtyard in which it lies is packed with a dense crowd of Japanese, pressed tight against the wooden rail surrounding the fiery arena. Attendants with long iron rods come forward and beat flat the charcoal, glowing quiet and bright in the gathering dusk, and at length the white-robed figure of the chief priest appears from the outhouse where the final ablutions of the devotees are made.

The priest walks round and round the fire, waving over it the *kanagi*—a ceremonial stick, about two feet long, with numberless lappets of white paper attached to the end—, and stopping at various points in his round to raise his hands in prayer.

Then another white figure appears, throwing down a quantity of salt at the head of the bed of fire and also on the fire itself. Salt in Japan is credited with great cleansing properties, and this is the last thing the walkers tread on before embarking on the fiery passage, so that

they may be sure that their feet are free from any possible impurity.

Finally priest and followers walk fearlessly and deliberately over the pathway of glowing fire. There is not so much as a smell of scorching, though the flimsy white gowns of the devotees hang to their ankles.

After the ascetics have passed over the fire several times, they call out that they have tried the fire—that it has no power to burn and anyone who likes may now pass over. Then a strange thing happens. Japanese men, women, and children in a continuous stream pass over the furnace—unhurt. And what is perhaps even more startling is the fact that on several occasions Europeans who have attempted to join the Japanese in this strange walk have been laid up for weeks afterwards with terrible burns.

The more general method of fire-walking adopted in Asia, however, is to prepare a long trench, line it with stones, and on these to light a fire until the stones are white-hot. This is the procedure at such performances in India and throughout Polynesia. It has been suggested that a covering of ash remains over the stones to protect the feet of the fire-walkers. But this could not have been so at the Shinto ceremony, which took place on glowing charcoal, and I think that it may almost certainly be ruled out in other cases as well.

In an account of a fire-walking ceremony in the Fiji Islands given by the aide-de-camp of Lord Stanmore, one time Governor of the Islands, it was described how, before the actual ceremony, the wood ashes were swept from the stones with whisks of leaves on the end of long sticks ; and the narrator described the heat given off by the glowing stones as intolerable at a distance of ten feet.

On other occasions sceptical spectators have thrown handkerchiefs into the trench immediately before the walkers entered it. Invariably the handkerchiefs have burst into flames in an instant, though none of the celebrants' often extremely inflammable garments were as much as scorched.

Even though those who practise fire-walking are usually accustomed to going bare-foot, it is impossible to believe that they have hardened their feet to such a degree as to be able to withstand such heat as this.

One possible explanation which has been advanced to explain the wonderful feat of fire-walking is that, like spiritualistic mediums who have performed in Europe, the fire-walkers are able to produce ectoplasm (a mist-like extrusion without actual material form) which acts as a non-conductor between the soles of their feet and the white-hot path they tread.

But even this theory appears open to doubt in consideration of the fact that though several tests have been made, there is no recorded case of a fire-walker being able to place his hands upon the glowing stones ; while it is actually from the hands of Western mediums that extrusion of ectoplasm frequently takes place.

Most people have heard of fire-walking, a demonstration of this feat having actually been given in England in 1935, but few know anything about an equally mystifying ordeal, on the same principle, undergone by devotees of the Shinshukyo in Tokio every year. This is the *Yubana*, or boiling-water ordeal, which takes place on the first day of *Matsuri*, a festival lasting sometimes two, at others three, days.

Like the fire-walking rite, the *Yubana* ordeal is preceded by long and elaborate religious services, in which from twenty to thirty gorgeously attired priests and devotees

take part; and secondly by a prolonged ablutionary performance in which the devotees work themselves into an ecstasy of religious frenzy.

In the middle of the square before the temple stand two huge cauldrons, and while priests and devotees are still on their knees before the altar, offering a banquet of many courses to the god Ontaké, four coolies fill the iron vessels with water from a well and light under them wood fires.

Towards evening two devotees appear in the courtyard, clap their hands by way of summoning the notice of the god in whose faith they are about to perform the miracle, and proceed to make a circuit of the now furiously boiling cauldrons, solemnly stopping at the cardinal points to raise their arms in prayer. Offerings of salt are then placed round the rims of the cauldrons, and the pots are slowly stirred with the holy *Gohei*, the sacred wand to which zig-zag strips of paper are suspended.

All this ritual makes an impressive spectacle, but it is nothing to what follows. The two devotees now arm themselves with birch-rods. Holding these high above their heads, they stand a moment in silent invocation, and then begin in earnest. The bamboos are plunged into the cauldrons, and the boiling water is flung over each man's head and shoulders over and over again, the devotees flinging themselves from side to side and lashing themselves to a perfect frenzy.

Not content with drenching themselves, the participants in this extraordinary form of worship literally lash each other with their dripping bundles of bamboo. The fires hiss and splutter and clouds of steam almost hide the devotees from the view of the thousands of devout Japanese gathered in the courtyard to witness the miracle.

At last the strange rite ends. The two devotees stand forth, drenched to the skin and red as fire, but otherwise none the worse. The ground where they stand is a pool of water, the cauldrons are empty, the fires out. The omnipotence of the god has been made manifest.

Of the genuineness of the performance there can be absolutely no question; it has been witnessed and attested to by a number of Europeans of unquestionable integrity. But the mystery of how the apparent miracle is achieved remains insoluble.

The reason for its performance and that of the fire-walking ceremony has been explained by the Chief Priest of the Shinshukyo himself. Everything, according to the Shinto faith, is compounded of two parts—matter and spirit. When the spirit of the fire or of the water has been withdrawn, though both fire and water are still materially present they have no power to burn. One reason, then, for the performance of these two miracles is to confute the doctrine of materialism. The second reason is to prove to unbelievers the existence of God.

It would seem that the only way in which to explain such wellnigh incredible performances as these is to admit that they are made possible by the absolute faith of the fanatics who practise them—such faith as, we are told, moves mountains. But mysterious Asia, whose secrets somehow always seem to contrive to evade discovery has even, on occasion, provided instances in which religious "miracles" have occurred to persons who were complete sceptics in such matters, and where the question of faith cannot therefore arise.

One of the commonest religious beliefs throughout Asia—and indeed among all primitive peoples—is that certain trees are either actually inhabited by or are

particularly valued by the spirits who form part of the demonology of all pagan religions.

These spirits are held in very wholesome awe, for they are considered to be extremely malevolent if displeased in any way ; and every care is taken, not only to avoid giving offence to these Terrible Ones, but to keep them amiably disposed towards mankind. To this latter end suitable offerings are regularly placed on and around all " haunted " trees, which are thus unmistakably recognisable by reason of the weird assortment of gifts which invariably adorn them.

In many places there are trees which are generally believed to be the abode of spirits, and not one native in ten would venture to cut down such a tree. Many are the tales of disaster which have followed the desecration of such spirit-trees ; and it is no uncommon thing for the white man, in his dealings with native labour, to have to exclude trees, locally believed to be " haunted," from a contract for the clearing of a river bank or piece of jungle. This is the case not only in India and Malaya, but in many other widely separated corners of Asia.

With regard to tree-spirits, Sir Hugh Clifford, a former Resident Magistrate at Pahang, Malay Peninsula, gives an interesting account of an occurrence of which he himself remarks that the story was related to him in the manner which he describes, and that the man, whom he has called Trimlett, certainly had an exceedingly ugly wound in his foot, for which he accounted in " rather a curious manner."

Sir Hugh's story runs as follows :

At the time of the mysterious occurrence about to be related Trimlett was stationed in Pêrak, at an out of the way little place called Sĕpûteh, trying to teach the intractable Chinese miner not to mine on his neighbour's

land, and to refrain from appropriating his friend's pay dirt. The life was a lonely one, and there was nothing to be had in the nature of amusements such as Englishmen conjure up all the world over, wherever a few of them are gathered together.

This it was that drove Trimlett to tree-felling as an occupation, during his leisure hours. It was a healthy form of exercise, and kept the white man's muscles in good order for the occasional rough and tumble in which he was called upon to engage with refractory Chinese coolies.

The Malays put this hobby down to drunkenness, that useful explanation which, to the native mind, accounts for ninety per cent of the incomprehensible eccentricities of the White Man ; the Chinese imagined that Trimlett hoped to make a fortune out of the timber trade ; and the Englishman quite undisturbed by the opinion of those about him, went on hacking away at all the finest trees in his vicinity. For this was in the very early days, before such things as forest conservancy were dreamed of in Pêrak.

Clifford had occasion to visit Trimlett once or twice every month, and on one occasion Trimlett pointed out to him a gigantic *mĕrbau* tree, running up sheer into the sky, without branch or fork, to a height of more than a hundred feet.

At the foot of this tree in the spaces between the spreading, knotty roots, half a dozen handfuls of Chinese joss-sticks were stuck into the ground, their tips smouldering sulkily and emitting an unpleasantly " Chinese " smell. The charred ashes of tinsel paper lying all about marked spots where paper money, which was piously supposed to satisfy the financial desires of the Spirits, had been burned by some devout Chinamen. On pro-

jections of the bark, and from wands stuck in the ground, depended strips of foul rag, which both Chinese and Malays furnish to Beings of the Other World, with a view to supplying their strangely incomprehensible wants.

"I mean to have a try at that fellow one of these days," remarked Trimlett; and on being asked what he meant, declared his intention of one day felling the sacred *mĕrbau* tree, utterly refusing to heed Clifford's warning as to the foolishness of offending both Chinese and Malays by such a proceeding.

Some weeks later, continues Clifford's account, Trimlett was brought to him with a terrible wound in his left foot; and this is the explanation he gave of how he came by it.

For some time after his last meeting with the Resident Magistrate, his work had put all thoughts of the *mĕrbau* tree out of Trimlett's head. One day, however, feeling the need of occupation and of exercise, the challenge offered by the forest giant had recurred to him, and taking his keen axe, he had gone out to match his strength and skill against its mighty thickness.

On hearing of his intention, both the Chinese and the Malays had come to him, entreating him not to offend the Spirits by laying sacrilegious hands on the sacred tree, and when he had laughed at their expostulations they had even sent for the Malay headman of the district. But frankly incredulous of the natives' superstitions, and fired with that love of destruction which seems so typical of a certain type of Englishman, Trimlett had deliberately ignored all their prayers and warnings.

Arrived at the tree, he had taken a grip of his axe, planted his feet firmly, and delivered a mighty blow at the ancient trunk. The steel bit into the wood with a

crisp ring, the vibrations of which echoed eerily away into the jungle.

The thousand noises which, taken together, make the heavy stillness of the afternoon were lost for a moment, drowned by the sound of the axe stroke. Then the jungle songs broke out once more, as the echoes died away, on the scented, slow-breathing wind. A couple of *bârau-bârau* thrushes were warbling liquidly, and the shriek of the great noisy earthworm, that cries sullenly from its burrow a foot below the earth, strove manfully to drown the sweeter music of the birds. An odd dozen of *cicada* were chirping and ticking in the forest, and very far away the moaning hoot of the seamang monkeys could be faintly heard.

All these voices of bird, beast, and insect made the quiet evening air alive with sound, as in jungle places it always must be ; but, though the chorus went on with unabated vigour after that first blow of Trimlett's axe it seemed to the Englishman as though a kind of hush had fallen on the land.

He had some difficulty in explaining what he meant, when telling Clifford the story, but it seemed, he said, as though there were two spheres of sound—one in which he heard the chorus of birds and insects as clearly as ever, and another, totally different, in which the stillness seemed suddenly intensified, and deepened to an awful pitch of tension that had something terrifying in it.

It was this other, stranger, region of sound, however, that seemed for the moment the more real. The one in which the songs of bird and insect had a part appeared indescribably remote and distant.

It was a curious sensation to have experienced ; and afterwards, when he came to recall it, Trimlett felt

surprised that he had not been more impressed by it at the time. As it was, however, he read no warning in the strange prank that his ears appeared to be playing on him ; and he once more swung his axe back, high above his shoulder, preparatory to bringing it down for another blow, slightly advancing his left foot as he did so.

It was at this moment that he became aware of a weird object at his feet. It had no particular size, shape, or colour ; it bore no resemblance to any object Trimlett had ever seen. It simply forced the fact of its horrible, revolting, repulsive presence upon him without the Englishman being able to clearly distinguish through which of his senses the unearthly impression was conveyed.

The object seemed to seize his attention with a grip that was an agony ; to rivet every function of his mind ; to possess him utterly with an overwhelming aversion and uncontrollable fear.

Trimlett's axe was lifted for a stroke, and, almost before he was aware of what he was doing, he had brought it crashing down on the Unspeakable Uncleanness at his feet. It was not until apprised of the fact by an agony of pain that Trimlett became aware that the object at which he had smitten so fiercely was his own left foot.

Even then, the idea of that appalling Presence was so firmly fixed in his mind that, as he fell, Trimlett tried with all his might to throw himself down on the side farthest from that on which he believed it to be.

The earth for many yards round the tree was worn bare and smooth by the passing of countless generations of horny-footed worshippers ; so that there was not sufficient cover to conceal a beetle. But save for the red gouts of blood which welled from his gashed foot,

Trimlett could find absolutely nothing ; nor had he any explanation of what had caused him to strike so terribly into his own limb.

Now in this case the mysterious manifestation occurred to a man completely sceptical of all the beliefs attached to the tree. Trimlett, in recounting the circumstances, was very clear on this point, and was wont to resent any suggestion that the occurrence was due to any pre-conceived opinion on his part that the felling of the tree would be accompanied by some supernatural event.

The warnings of protests of the natives, he averred, had left absolutely no impression on his mind. As he had stood before the tree before attacking it, no thought of its supposed sanctity, no memory of the spirits to whom, the headman had said, the tree was dear, had been in his mind. He had felt no greater excitement than he was accustomed to experience when his axe was in his hand and a new forest giant of more than ordinary dimensions was marked for the felling.

Had his mind admitted the faintest possibility of there being any foundation to the natives' fears concerning it, Trimlett would hardly have attacked that particular tree, with the whole jungle from which to choose. Nor is a man of his stamp likely to have invented such a story, showing himself, as it does, in anything but a flattering light.

There can be no question of faith working miracles here ; and I can only leave it to others to form their own conclusions.

Another well-known mystery of Asiatic magic, and one which has never satisfactorily been explained, is that in which material objects, often stones, are moved about by some invisible agency. This extraordinary

and highly effective method of persecution or protest is extremely widespread throughout the East.

Whatever the means used to bring it about, "magic" of this kind takes two forms: that of induced phenomena, where professional mediums—medicine men and the like—are the agents; and spontaneous phenomena, where, at least, no professional medium is present, and no séance is being held. In either case the results are similar; a rain of stones or other missiles descends from nowhere upon some person or object, or else that person's possessions become mysteriously endowed with motive powers of their own, and career about in terrifying fashion.

Such occurrences are obviously impossible; there must be some perfectly natural explanation, you may say. But there have been numerous cases of Europeans encountering experiences of this kind, experiences of which the closest investigation has failed to reveal any explanation but that of occult powers beyond the knowledge of the Western world.

Mr. Dennys (*Folklore of China*, 1876) speaks of a Chinese householder who was driven to take refuge in a temple by the unusual phenomena—the throwing about of crockery and sounds of heavy footfalls, after the decease of an aggrieved monkey. This is only one of the many Chinese cases of so-called poltergeist; and the phenomena are described in Jesuit narratives of the eighteenth century, from Cochin China.

An amazing story of poltergeist reported from Central India, not many years ago, tells how three Mohammedans, a father and his two sons, living in a small hut, complained to the police that someone was persistently playing dangerous practical jokes upon them. Quite large stones, coming apparently from nowhere, re-

peatedly fell inside their hut, and they were living in constant terror of their lives, they said.

A thorough search of the walls and roof of the hut revealed no aperture through which a stone could have been flung, yet a considerable pile of these missiles, collected by the occupants to substantiate their tale, were found lying in a corner.

There was one thing particularly remarkable about these stones. They were not of the rough granite type found in great profusion in the neighbourhood, but resembled those found in the beds of rivers, being round and obviously water-worn, about the size of a cricket-ball. It seemed, to say the least of it, extraordinary that, with quantities of stones lying all about, anyone who wished to bombard the hut should have taken the trouble to go to the nearest river, several miles away, to obtain his ammunition.

The occupant of the hut, a respectable, grey-bearded old gentleman, was in a sorry condition. "I cannot sleep, sahib," he complained. "So long as I am reading the Koran I am left severely alone, but if I doze for a moment, crash! comes a stone, always just missing me by a hair's breadth. I shall of a certainty go mad if your honour does not do something to stop these unwelcome attentions."

That night a cordon of police was posted round the hut, and the police officer, and a companion, joined the Mohammedan inside, prepared to sit up until something happened. Several hours passed uneventfully enough, the stillness of the little hut being disturbed only by the peaceful bubbling of their host's *hookah*. The watchers were beginning to think that the presence of the police cordon outside had effectually put a stop to the activities of the mysterious stone-thrower, when

suddenly, about midnight, they were aroused by a curious swishing sound, like some small object flying through the air, and an exclamation of deadly fear.

The light of their electric torches, switched hurriedly on, revealed the *hookah* in fragments on the floor, and its owner almost beside himself with fear. Among the shattered pieces of the *hookah* lay a round stone, which had obviously caused the damage. The cordon surrounding the hut were immediately questioned, but no one had seen any suspicious character about.

No further demonstration took place that night before the investigators left; but next morning, when they returned to the camp, they were met by their host of the previous night, looking very bedraggled and holding in his hands the remains of a pillow.

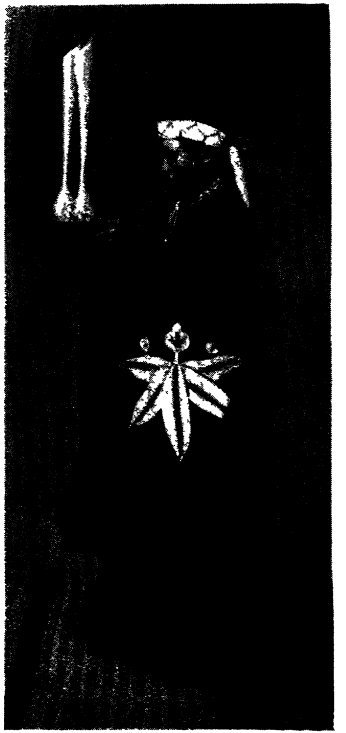
"Look, sahibs, see what this devil has done to me!" exclaimed the old man on seeing the two Englishmen. "After you left me last night, sahibs, I grew so weary from lack of sleep that at last, being unable to keep my eyes open any longer, I blew out the lamp and laid myself down to sleep. So tired was I that I verily believe a gun fired in my ear would not have awakened me. Hence it was that a couple of my ubiquitous tormentors, the stones which I discovered this morning lying beside me, failed to have the desired effect. What it was that eventually awakened me I do not know, but after a time I jumped up to find my pillow alight, and it was only with difficulty that the fire was quenched."

The business had now become too serious to be left at that, so the unfortunate Mohammedans were transferred to another home, and, the next night, a party of Europeans, including two ladies, took up their position in the haunted hut, sitting round on benches provided



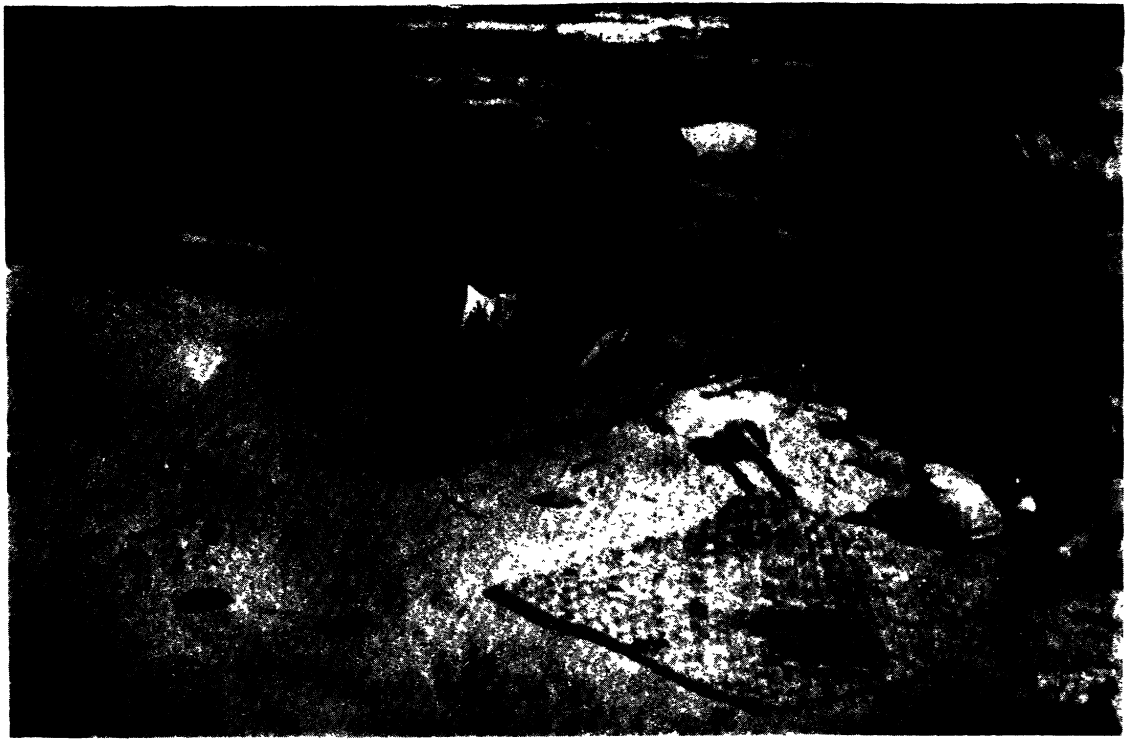
By courtesy of the London Missionary Society

A SNAKE-CHARMER WITH HIS COBRA



By courtesy of the British and Foreign Bible Society

A SHINTO PRIEST OFFERING



By courtesy of the London Missionary Society

AN INDIAN FAKIR

for the purpose, and with a lamp burning to give the unknown marksman a target.

Several hours went by, and nothing happened; and some of the party were carrying on a whispered conversation, when suddenly an affrighted exclamation from one of the women put a stop to the conversation and drew all eyes in her direction. To everybody's complete astonishment and mystification, a fine trickle of sand was seen to be rolling gently down the lady's hat and dropping to the floor.

Try as they would, no one succeeded in discovering the source of this mysterious trickle of sand; it just came pouring down from the crown of the hat to the brim, and from thence to the floor. The duration of this odd phenomenon was a matter of seconds only, for when a united movement was made in the lady's direction the sand-flow ceased.

No further happenings of any unusual kind took place that night, but one other point in connection with that extraordinary evening seems worthy of mention. A fox-terrier belonging to one of the party, on reaching the door of the hut, cowered away and positively refused to enter, whimpering pitifully at every order of its master. At last they managed to coax it in, but only for a few moments; then, with a wild howl, it broke away from its owner and rushed out into the night.

That is the story, no more incredible than the hundreds of similar ones recorded from many different parts of Asia; but the mystery of those unaccountable manifestations has never been cleared up. After the removal of the Mohammedans no tenant could be found for the haunted hut, and, shortly afterwards, it was demolished. In their new home the three victims of the stone-throwing lived entirely unmolested, nor were there any

further manifestations on the site where the hut had stood.

Many weird rumours, of course, circulated in the village as the result of this affair. Perhaps the most interesting of these was to the effect that beneath the spot on which the hut had been built was the grave of an extremely holy fakir, who, to show his disapproval of this profanation of his last resting-place, caused the annoyances to be perpetrated, the removal of the obnoxious house synchronising with the cessation of hostilities.

However that may be, this case is particularly interesting in view of the addition of the phenomena of the fire and of the sand to the more common one of stone-throwing.

As recently as in July, 1936, a report, published in the English newspapers, was received from Karachi, describing how men and women were injured by flying stones as they fled in panic from a Saturday midnight Hindu religious feast, held to mourn the death of a child drowned in a garden tank.

While the party of sixty persons were gathered at the prayer-feast, with Sadhus reciting Mantras, a heavy shower of stones struck the building, frightening the women. The men, suspecting mischief-makers, searched the district without result.

Panic followed when, on recommencing the ceremony, the shower of stones began again. The report stated that the same building had been the scene of similar poltergeist manifestations previously.

So widely recognised, in fact, are these occurrences throughout Asia that no less a body than the Society for Psychical Research has investigated the question thoroughly. But while, in the case of such phenomena

being induced by professional mediums and fakirs, the investigators' tests admittedly resulted, in many cases, in the detection of fraud, in the case of spontaneous phenomena they have to admit themselves baffled.

The mystery of the poltergeist is genuine enough, in spite of the conjuring of certain fraudulent " mediums," but to discover a satisfactory solution to that mystery appears to be beyond the powers of science.

CHAPTER II

HUMAN ANIMALS OF ASIA

MOST people would probably admit the possibility of a man or woman being born with a nature so bestial as to be possessed by an overpowering lust for human blood. For the mind of man is a labyrinth, the full complexity of whose intricacies we have only just begun to realise, and with that realisation has come the knowledge that many an unsuspected track in this psychological maze leads down to a jungle lair. But that a human being should not only possess the nature of an animal, but also the power of assuming its actual physical form, is a fact that many may find difficult to believe.

Yet unquestioning belief in the existence of such human animals is widespread throughout Asia, and, what is more, many sinister incidents have occurred, and still do occur, to provide the very strongest grounds for that belief.

In Malaya, for example, the natives of Korinchi, a little state in Sumatra, are generally accredited with a marked addiction to prowling forth at night in the guise of a ravening beast (in their case, a tiger), "seeking whom he may devour." The Korinchi strenuously deny the charge; but every Malay knows of the countless Korinchi men who, for instance, have vomited feathers after feasting upon fowls, when for the purpose they had assumed the forms of tigers, and the human flesh

they craved had failed to be forthcoming. And even stranger and more conclusive evidence of the actuality of human- or were-animals has appeared in Malaya and elsewhere.

Ridiculous superstition ! Such a thing is obviously impossible ; it's contrary to the laws of nature you may say. But how else is one to account for the following story, recorded by Sir Hugh Clifford ? There seems no rational explanation of the incident, yet Clifford vouches for the fact that the whole affair happened just as he describes it.

The Slim Valley lies across the hills which divide Pahang from Pêrak. It is peopled with Malays of various races—Rawas and Mĕnangkâbaus from Sumatra, Pêrak men from the Kinta valley, men from Pahang, and the sweepings of Java, Sumatra, and the Peninsula. It was from this place came the following extraordinary story of a were-tiger, who was shot, in tiger form, by the headman of a native village, and actually bore the wound when restored to his human shape.

Into the Slim Valley some years ago there came a Korinchi trader named Haji Äli and his two sons, Äbdulrahman and Äbas. They came, as is the manner of their people, laden with heavy packs of sarongs—the native skirts or waist-cloths—hawking their goods through the forests and villages.

The peddlers stayed long after all their goods were disposed of, for Haji Äli took a fancy to the place, purchasing a hut and compound, and with his sons planting coco-nuts and cultivating a rice swamp. They were quiet, well-behaved people, regular attendants at the local mosque for the Friday congregational prayers, and soon became prosperous and wealthy.

Presently it became known that Haji Äli was looking

round for a wife, and there was no lack of parents eager to wed their daughters to one who was known to all as a " warm " man. Haji Äli's choice fell upon Patimah, the daughter of a couple of poor peasants in a neighbouring village, a comely girl, plump and round and light of colour, with a merry face and willing fingers wherewith to serve a husband.

The girl went willingly enough to her husband's hut after the marriage ceremony. She was exchanging poverty for wealth, a miserable hovel for a handsome home, and parents who knew exactly how to get out of her the last fraction of work of which she was capable for a husband who seemed invariably kind, generous, and indulgent.

None the less, three days later Patimah was found beating wildly on the door of her parents' house at dawn, trembling and dishevelled, drenched with dew from the forest through which she had come, and half mad with fear. Her story—the first act in the drama of the Were-Tiger of Slim—ran as follows.

She had no complaint about her husband's treatment of her ; she had received nothing but kindness in her new home ; but she had fled his dwelling, and her parents might " hang her on high, sell her in a far land, scorch her with the sun's rays, immerse her in water, burn her with fire," but never again would she return to one who hunted by night as a Were-Tiger.

Every evening, after the hour of evening prayer, Haji Äli had left the house on some pretext or other, and had not returned until the hour before dawn. Twice she had not been aware of his return until she found him lying on the sleeping mat by her side ; but on the third night she had remained awake until a noise outside had warned her that her husband was coming.

Silently she had slipped to the door, and in the waning light of the moon had seen the sight which had driven her mad with terror.

On the topmost rung of the ladder which, in this, as in all Malay houses, led from the ground to the threshold of the door, there rested the head of a full-grown tiger. She could see the thick black stripes which marked its glossy hide, the bristling wires of its whiskers, the long cruel teeth, and the fierce green light in the creature's eyes. On either side of the great head lay the tiger's front paws on the top rung of the ladder, the lower portion of its body reaching to the ground.

Paralysed with horror, the girl crouched staring at the terrible apparition before her, and even as she watched, a kind of tremor passed over the grim head at her feet. The tiger's features began to palpitate and grow hazy, and gradually they changed to those of a man, much as the face of a diver comes to the surface of a pool. In another moment Patimah saw that it was her own husband, Haji Äli, ascending the ladder.

At that the spell which had held her snapped, and with a scream of terror the girl had leaped through the doorway past her husband, never stopping until she had reached her own home.

It is significant that normally the Malay women have a lively terror of the jungle, and never dream of entering it alone, even in the daytime. Whereas, whatever it was that Patimah saw, it inspired her with such an agony of fear that she did not hesitate to make a journey of several miles through this same jungle, alone and by the eerie light of the moon, rather than stay and face it.

The story, of course, rapidly spread, and Haji Äli, making no attempt to recover his young bride, his

neighbours drew the natural conclusion, and left him and his sons severely alone.

But further developments in this extraordinary affair were yet to come.

One night a fine young water-buffalo, the property of the headman of the village, was killed by a tiger. Its owner, saying no word to any man, constructed an ingenious spring-gun over the carcass, so arranged that any beast approaching it must foul the lines and fire off the heavy charge.

The following night a loud report apprised the headman that something had fouled his tiger lines. It was probably the tiger, returned to his kill, and if wounded was likely to prove unpleasant in the dark ; so he lay down to wait for the dawn.

Next morning, with nearly a dozen followers armed with two guns and many spears and kris, the headman set out for the kill. Here there was no difficulty in finding the tiger's tracks, and the tearing up of the earth at a spot where the grass was thickly flecked with blood showed that the shot had taken effect.

To follow the tracks was an easy matter, for the beast had gone heavily on three legs, the off-hind leg dragging uselessly, while here and there the trail was plainly marked with blood. No one was particularly surprised when the trail led to Haji Äli's compound, and was lost in the open space before the house at a spot where the rank spear-blades of *lalang* grass were flattened by the falling of a heavy body.

A veritable pool of blood marked this spot, and to it ran the trail of the limping tiger. Away from there no tracks were visible save those of the human beings who come and go through the rank growths which cloak the earth in Malay compounds.

Taking a firm grip on his ancient gun, the headman led the way up the ladder which led to the house-door. Haji Äli's son Äbas sat cross-legged in the outer apartment, preparing a quid of betel-nut with elaborate care.

"We have come to see your father," announced the headman.

"My father is sick," he was told.

"Whence came that pool of blood in your compound?"

"We killed a goat yesterday."

"Have you the skin? I am reheading my drums, and would buy it of you."

"The skin was mangy, and we threw it in the river."

"Where is your father? We wish to see him."

In answer to the last query Haji Äli's second son suddenly appeared in the doorway of the inner apartment, a kris in his hand.

"Our father is sick. He wishes to sleep. Your words keep him awake. Go away at once," Äbdulrahman growled out, brandishing his sword threateningly.

There was nothing for it but to retreat; but under the house, just below the place in the inner apartment where Haji Äli might be supposed to be lying, the visitors observed that the ground was stained with a patch of red. Malay floors are made of laths of wood or bamboo, laid parallel with spaces between each. This is convenient, as the whole of the ground beneath the house can be used as a slop-pail, waste-basket, and rubbish-heap. The red stain lying where it did, had the look of blood from someone within the house whose wound had very recently been washed and dressed.

The evidence is inconclusive, of course. But shortly afterwards Haji Äli and his sons disappeared down the river at dead of night, without stopping to reap their

ripening crops or to sell their house and compound, bought with good money. This is a fact, and to anyone who knows the passion for wealth and for property which is to be found in the breast of every Sumatran Malay, it is perhaps the most significant circumstance of all the weird events in this extraordinary affair.

Some months later Haji Äli and his two sons turned up in quite another part of the Peninsula. There was nothing out of the way about them to mark them from their fellow-men, except that Haji Äli went lame on the right leg.

The foregoing is no isolated case. Throughout the length and breadth of Asia, cases as circumstantially detailed and as well authenticated, are continually coming to light. Countless strange and fantastic happenings are on record which seem explicable by no other theory.

As for such a phenomenon being against the laws of nature, if you ask the Society for Psychical Research for an opinion on the subject, they will tell you that the belief in ghosts, magic, witchcraft and the like having existed in all ages and in every land, is in itself a fact sufficient to warrant a faith in these things, and to establish a strong probability of their reality. And if ghosts, phantoms, and witchcraft are to be accepted on such grounds by such a body of Wise Men of the West, why not the reality of the were-wolf, the were-tiger, and all their gruesome family?

Wherever there are wild beasts to prey on men there also is found the belief that the worst and most rapacious of the man-eaters are themselves human beings, who have been driven temporarily to assume the form of an animal by the Black Art, in order to satisfy their lust for blood. This belief, which seems to be based on an

extremely cynical appreciation of the bloodthirsty character of the human race, is held by white man and brown, yellow and black, independently and without receiving the idea from one another.

Many of Asia's secrets are grim, but none are more grim than the terrible mystery of the were-creatures said to prowl her forests, her plains and mountains, pulling down helpless children, women, and even grown men, in their insensate desire for blood.

Quite briefly, the phenomenon of the were-animal takes this form : a man or a woman is consumed by an overwhelming desire to tear and eat raw flesh—preferably human flesh. To this end, he actually changes his corporal human form into that of a carnivorous animal, in which guise he ranges the countryside in search of a victim. His inhuman appetite sated, he resumed his human form once more, and returns to the normal life of his fellows.

Sometimes this mysterious transformation comes about involuntarily, at others it is deliberately effected through the agency of certain magical observances. In some cases the were-animal in his human form is marked out by an exceptional ferocity and brutality of temperament, but more frequently there appears nothing to mark him out from his fellows, and his double existence may go entirely unsuspected for a considerable time before some incident occurs to direct suspicion towards him.

The particular animal form assumed varies in accordance with the natural fauna of the locality, the form of the most rapacious beast common to a particular country being usually the one manifested in that country. Thus among the frozen wastes of Siberia the human animal takes the form of the were-wolf; while in

Sumatra, where the wolf is unknown, the human form is exchanged for that of the were-tiger.

Most were-animals, it is said, have some peculiarity which distinguishes them from normal beasts. Thus one of the special distinguishing marks of the *rimau kramat*, or were-tiger, is believed by Malays to be the possessor of one foot smaller than the others ; just as, in Burma, the possession of one tusk smaller than the other is said to be the mark of the were-elephant.

Reports of these mysterious and dreadful creatures come from many widely separated corners of the East. In India, and particularly among the Garrows of Bengal, were-tigers are well known. And to this day Hindus settled in Chota-Nagpur and Singbhum firmly believe that the *Mundas* have powers of witchcraft whereby they can transform themselves into tigers and other beasts of prey to devour their enemies. It is to the wildest and most savage of the tribe that such powers are generally ascribed.

In Japan, the shape assumed by man-animals is most usually that of a fox. The were-fox shows a marked difference from the majority of were-animals, in that usually it is a fox that becomes a man or woman, instead of vice versa.

The method of effecting this mysterious change attributed to the fox by the Japanese is particularly remarkable. According to tradition, the animal ranges the plains until it comes upon an old skull. This it places on its head, and facing towards the north star, does worship to its gods. At first it performs its religious genuflections slowly and with circumspection, but by and by its motions become convulsively rapid and its leaps violently active. After one hundred acts of worship the fox becomes capable of transforming itself into a

human being, but if it desires to assume the shape of a maiden it must live in the vicinity of a graveyard.

Incorrigibly amorous, apparently, the fox is particularly prone to assume the female form, in order to advance an amour with some man; and Japanese legend and tradition are full of stories of these fox-maidens. To Western minds these seem fantastically incredible, but it must be admitted that, in this connection, inexplicable things do happen—incidents which merely serve to deepen the sinister mystery which continues to surround the human animals of Asia.

Not many years ago a Tokio journal published an extraordinary experience of a physician in the Tochigi prefecture. This doctor was summoned at midnight to attend a lady in her confinement. He arrived, however, to find the event over, and only some trifling medicines needed. Having received his fee and been regaled with some macaroni, the physician returned home, but next morning, when he opened his purse, he found to his astonishment that the coins he had received at his patient's residence had become merely a few withered leaves.

He hastened to revisit the place, and guided by the tracks of the cart which had fetched him the previous night had no difficulty in reaching the spot. The doctor's bewilderment may well be imagined when, on arrival, he found that the house had disappeared. All that there was to be seen was a small tea plantation. But few people had any further doubts as to the solution of the mystery when it was learned that in the middle of this plantation a young fox lay dying.

The macaroni alone had been real; of that fact the doctor had been able to assure himself, and its origin

was subsequently explained by the discovery that macaroni which had been prepared for a wedding feast in a neighbouring hamlet had been stolen the same evening.

There are scores of such stories current in Japan and hundreds of people listen to them gravely.

In China, as in Japan, human animals may be of various species, but the most usual forms for these animal-men are those of a tiger, the wolf and the fox.

In addition to the Korinchi, the power of transforming themselves into tigers, in Sumatra, is alleged of the inhabitants of a large village on the Dempu, a volcano in Palembang. Often, it is said, these villagers come down to carry off girls from other villages.

Of the Korinchi it is said that there is a whole village of *urang chindaku.* There are certain times in the year when, as royal tigers, they haunt the forests far and wide and ravage the habitations of men. Whenever, on these excursions, it suits their purpose they resume human shape, being then unrecognisable, but from the absence of a gully in the upper lip. A favourite trick of these *urang chindaku* is to enter human dwellings and ask for night lodgings ; then, when everybody is asleep, they swiftly put on their tiger form, attack the inmates, and devour their hearts. They are also said to prey on cattle.

A similar village of man-tigers is reported in the island of Sumatra, on Mount Lamongan. The natives of the environs take care not to pass the night there ; and, in fact, the villagers themselves refuse strangers night lodgings, for better than anybody they know their dangerous power, though not the times at which their changes may take place.

But perhaps the ideal haunt of all things mysterious and uncanny is cold, grey, gaunt Russia-in-Asia, and, certainly, nowhere in the world does the were-wolf remain more in evidence to-day. A thinly populated country—vast stretches of wild, uncultivated land, full of dense forests, rich in trees most favourable to elementals, and watered by deep silent tarns—its very atmosphere is impregnated with were-wolfism.

It has even been said that there are were-wolf flowers in the forests of Siberia, flowers which have the property of converting into were-wolves whoever plucks and wears them. These flowers are supposed to be of various colours—white, yellow, red, and a species of a bluish-white hue, which emits a mysterious glow at night, like the phosphorus emanating from decaying animal and vegetable matter.

Concerning the truth, or otherwise, of these assertions I should prefer to express no opinion ; but even without magical flowers, the phenomena of were-wolfism throughout Russia-in-Asia are sufficiently startling and mysterious.

There appears to be no restriction as to the sex of were-wolves in Russia and Siberia ; male and female were-wolves are recorded in about equal numbers, though with perhaps a slight preponderance in favour of females. According to existing Russian literature on the subject, though many were-wolves in that country inherit the property of transformation, many, too, acquire it through direct intercourse with the super-physical. For the invocation of spirits, whether performed individually or collectively, is by no means unknown, even to-day, in remote hamlets.

Black Magic is known to be practised at the present time in the Urals, the Caucasus, the Yerkhoiansk, and

Stanovoi mountains, the Kola Peninsula, and in various parts of Siberia.

According to various authorities on the supernatural, the usual initiation ceremony consists in drawing a circle of from 7 to 9 feet in radius, in the centre of which a wood fire is kindled, the wood selected being black poplar, pine, or larch, never ash. A fumigation in an iron vessel, heated over the fire, is then made out of a mixture of pungent-smelling herbs, and a mystic incantation is recited by the candidate to the grisly brotherhood.

The incantation concluded, the suppliant then kisses the ground three times, and, advancing to the fire, takes off the iron vessel, and whirling it smoking round his head, cries out :

Make me a were-wolf ! Make me a man-eater !
Make me a were-wolf ! Make me a woman-eater !
Make me a were-wolf ! Make me a child-eater !
I pine for blood—Human blood !
Give it me. Give it me to-night.
Great Wolf Spirit, give it me, and
Heart, body and soul, I am yours !

Whereupon, it is said, the most fantastic things take place ; the trees begin to rustle and the wind to moan, and out of the sudden darkness which envelops everything glows the tall, cylindrical, pillar-like phantom of the Unknown, 7 or 8 feet in height. This mysterious figure sometimes develops further, and assumes the form of a tall, thin monstrosity, half-human, half-animal, grey and nude, with very long legs and arms, and the feet and claws of a wolf.

The head of this apparition is shaped like that of a wolf, but covered with the hair of a woman, which falls about his bare shoulders in long yellow ringlets. It has wolf's ears and a wolf's mouth. Its aquiline nose and

pale eyes are fashioned like those of a human being, but are animated by an expression too diabolically malignant to proceed from anything but the super-physical.

It seldom, if ever, speaks, but utters some extra-ordinary noise—a prolonged howl that seems to proceed from the bowels of the earth, a piercing, harrowing whine, or a low laugh, full of hellish glee—any of which sounds may be taken to express its assent to the favour asked.

This terrifying spectre remains visible for only a moment and then disappears with startling abruptness. The suppliant is now a were-wolf. He undergoes his first metamorphosis into wolf form the following evening at sunset, reassuming human shape at dawn ; and so on, day after day, until his death, when he may once more metamorphose, either from man form to wolf form or vice versa, his corpse retaining whichever form has been assumed at the moment of death.

In Russia women appear particularly prone to were-wolfism, and when a woman metamorphoses thus, her craving for human flesh is said to be insatiable. Female were-wolves, in fact, are usually far more cruel and daring and much more dreaded than male ones. It is said that the motive of these mysterious wolf-women is usually that of revenge, sometimes on a faithless lover, more often on another woman—an interesting sidelight on the psychology of the " gentler sex."

So terrible have been the depredations of these humans mysteriously turned animal, throughout Russia-in-Asia, that a regular system of exorcism has been evolved for the purpose of eradicating this evil property from those possessed by it. Trials of suspected were-wolves have been common in the past ; they are not

unknown in remote districts of Siberia and elsewhere, even to-day.

Sometimes the suspected, or proven, were-wolf is soundly whipped with ash twigs, and saturated with a mysterious potion—often either sulphur, asafœtida and castoreum, mixed with clear spring water ; or hypericum compounded with vinegar ; which two potions seem to have been the most favoured recipes for removing the devilish power.

Another method of exorcism is to make the were-wolf lie or sit over a vessel containing a similar compounded herbal fumigation ; or sometimes again he is well whipped and rubbed all over with the juice of the mistletoe berry.

An altar is erected and on it placed lighted candles, a Bible and a crucifix. The were-wolf, in wolf form, bound hand and foot, is placed on the ground at the foot of the altar, fumigated with incense, and sprinkled with holy water. The sign of the cross is then made on its forehead, chest, back, and the palms of its hands ; and the exorcism concludes with the priest, in a loud voice, commanding the evil spirit to depart in the name of God the Father, the Holy Ghost, and the Virgin Mary.

It is very seldom, however, that such exorcisms are effective. Such cases as have been reported have rarely been satisfactorily substantiated, and the rule seems to be—once a were-creature, always a were-creature.

Such is the grim mystery of Asia's human animals. We recognise the horrible facts—evidence may be had in plenty, the evidence of sober-minded men, whose words in a court of justice would bring conviction to the mind of the sceptical juryman—but we have no explanation of them. To us such facts may seem incredible,

but nevertheless they are there, weird, fantastic, but inescapable ; an ever-present reminder that in Asia the Age of Witchcraft lives to-day as lustily as when, in past years, witches blazed at Smithfield, or died with rending gulps and bursting lungs, lashed fast to an English ducking-stool.

CHAPTER III

THE SECRET SOCIETIES OF THE EAST

IF there is one type of mystery which is universal and paramount throughout Asia it is that of the secret society. There is scarcely a people—civilised, uncultured or savage—in the whole of that vast continent or its outlying islands, among whom a secret society of some form does not exist and has not existed from time immemorial.

Many of these societies have a religious or quasi-religious motive for their being, and in all, or practically all of them, mystery and secret ceremonial observances based on mystic elements have played a leading part in influencing and dominating their adherents. Their secrets—many of them of the grimmest and most sinister nature—have remained since the dawn of history among the most closely guarded, and therefore the most fascinating, mysteries of the East.

One thing only is certain about the generality of Asiatic secret societies of a fundamentally religious character. Although in the course of ages their mystic teaching has become overlaid with superstitions and meaningless barbarities it has been proved from ancient literature, as well as from monuments of the most remote antiquity, that the mysteries originally conceived by men in prehistoric times were really founded on the immutable laws of nature. Where these people have

erred has been in taking what are merely the phenomena resulting from the observance of those laws, for their inner spirit.

At a place known as Atamut, high among the mountains of Persia, lies a deep green valley, guarded on all sides by snow peaks and rugged passes. Here, among cedars and lines of cypress trees, was established at the end of the eleventh century the white palace of one of the most powerful and terrible secret societies the world has ever known—the headquarters of the drug-crazed Assassins.

Cunningly hidden, and almost inaccessible among its dazzling snow-curtains, black hanging woods, and sheer walls of granite, it was a valley of easy sleep. There in great chambers lay young men dreaming of women ; languorous-eyed boys stood about the doorways with cups of madness held close to their breasts. They were eaters and drinkers of hashish, the deadly hemp, which causes its devotees to sleep much and to wake up mad. And in their midst, white-clad on a throne of white, sat their lord, the King of Death, among his ladies.

The founder of this murderous branch of the Shiite sect was a Syrian named Hassan-i-Sabbah, whose infamous career eventually earned for him the title of the Old Man of the Mountains.

The story goes that Hassan was on board a ship passing through the Red Sea when a terrific storm arose. Huge waves lashed and pounded the vessel, and all aboard expected that she would be dashed to pieces on the submerged rocks. Hassan-i-Sabbah alone, regardless of the raging elements, stood erect, calm, and self-possessed. In sonorous tones he ordered the storm to cease, and in a few minutes the wind dropped and the sea became as calm as a mill-pond.

To his awe-stricken fellow-travellers the Syrian then declared that he exercised a mysterious power over the forces of Nature, and that by virtue thereof he was about to found a great secret society of the Shiites. Convinced of the justice of his claim by the apparent miracle they had just witnessed, his companions became his first adherents.

Dark and bloody were the mysteries of the little community which eventually established itself in the secret valley of Musse. Under the guise of religious fanaticism, their lord set himself to become the hidden arbiter of the world's highest destinies. And, like an obscene white spider, crouched in the centre of a mysterious web which soon spread across half the civilised world, he did succeed in making of himself a Hidden Hand of almost illimitable power.

Though the inner mysteries of the Valley of Musse were guarded with fanatical closeness, and the Old Man of the Mountains, safe in his impregnable fortress, himself remained little more than a grim legend, the secret of the Assassins became known far beyond the confines of Asia Minor. The occupant of many a European throne trembled at their name, knowing full well that at a single word from the Old Man of Musse his life would not be worth a day's purchase.

This much gradually became known about the terrible Society of the Assassins. At the head of the sect was Hassan, the supreme ruler, and under him were three Grand Priors, who ruled the three provinces over which the Shaykh's power officially extended. Next came the body of Priors, who were fully initiated into all the secret doctrines, and were the emissaries of the faith. Fourth were the *Rafiqs*, who were in process of initiation, and ultimately advanced to the dignity of Priors. And

fifth came the most sinister order of all—the "Devoted Ones," who were the guards or Assassins proper. Finally, the sixth and seventh orders were the novices and common people.

Hassan's methods of obtaining the removal of those who stood in the way of his path to power were as peculiar as they were subtle and effective. The Assassin selected for the deed was first drugged with hashish, which drug heightens and distorts the perception of the senses and induces voluptuous visions in its devotees. When sufficiently drugged, the "Devoted One" was then allowed to wander at will among the beautiful gardens of the fortified valley. Here lovely young women, ravishingly attired and resplendent with jewels, would welcome him with all the delights most dear to the heart of the Oriental.

For several days the youth would be allowed to remain in these enchanting circumstances, being easily made to believe that he was in Paradise among the houris promised as the sure reward of the Faithful. But before he could grow satiated with the supernal pleasures at his disposal he would be summoned before the Lord of the Mountains, and informed that he had but to obey his Master's command to be allowed to return to enjoy for evermore the delights of Elysium, of which he had just been permitted so alluring a foretaste.

The drugged youth, easily believing that his lord really had the power to fulfil his promise, was at once ready to commit any crime.

Many never returned from their perilous mission, for no terror of torture or death would turn them from their task, once undertaken. And of those who did return, a swift end was made, should the deadly charm of hashish fail to render them submissive to their lot.

The influence which Hassan-i-Sabbah wielded over his followers was stupendous, as is well exemplified in the case of a certain Turkish Sultan who had summoned the Lord of the Assassins to appear before him on a charge of treason. To demonstrate his power, Hassan called one of the two followers by whom he was accompanied.

"Cast yourself down from these stairs into the courtyard below," he commanded the youth.

Instantly the young man did as he had been told. He was killed on the spot.

"There!" said Hassan. "At my command thousands will do likewise; and equally ready will they be to kill you or anyone else who should thwart me."

The Sultan changed his mind about interfering with so formidable a despot.

After a long and prosperous rule Hassan-i-Sabbah died in 1124, but for more than another century the mysterious figures of the Assassins, in their muffling white robes, lurked here and there among the courts of Europe and the East. A courteous greeting, a quick stab in the dark, and one more victim had gone to swell the toll taken of the powerful and the great by this terrible society.

Mysterious were their weapons and far-reaching their arm. A branch of the Assassins which was established in Syria was responsible for the deaths of Count Raymond of Tripoli and of Conrad of Montferrat during the Crusades. It is said that Richard Cœur de Lion caused an attempt to be made by an Assassin on the life of the King of France. And the nephew of the Emperor Frederick II was excommunicated by the Pope for having caused the Duke of Bavaria to be murdered by one of the terrible Order.

Even to-day small bodies of this once powerful secret society exist in the mountains of Syria and in Persia. What secret rites they practise among themselves in their mountain fastnesses, and to what extent their hidden hand is still responsible for sudden death in the Near East, is a mystery which none but their own grim and unknown initiates can solve.

Syria, long the home of many fanatical sects, to-day contains the hiding-places of two other mysterious secret societies, in addition to its scattered groups of Assassins. The first of these societies, though officially they style themselves Unitarians, are no other than the peculiar people originally known as Druses.

The title of the Druses was derived from that of their first teacher, Durazi, believed to have been a native of Afghanistan ; and besides this Durazi they acknowledge another chief and teacher, a Moslem named Hakem, who was murdered at the instigation of his sister. The latter, in order to make capital out of her brother's alleged mystic powers, upon his death caused his clothes to be skilfully sewn together, after the body had been secretly buried. Later, when Hakem's clothes had been found but not his body, it was given out that their Teacher had rendered himself invisible.

The story was universally believed, and the Moslem became the patron saint of the sect. The Druses assert that Hakem possessed a subtle body, and was able to leave his clothes without opening or tearing them.

There are believed to be about 200,000 Druses surviving at the present time, these being mostly centred round Damascus. But so closely are their secrets guarded that they and their doings still succeed in remaining wrapt in an almost impenetrable veil of mystery. Numerous secret signs and passwords are employed by

them to this end, and it is known that the penalty among them for revealing any of the secrets of the inner orders of their society is death.

Even the tenets of the Druses' faith is an unsolved mystery. When conversing with a Christian they call themselves Christians; when talking with a Moslem they say they are of his religion. Like St. Paul, they appear to be anxious to be all things to all men, and the arrangement certainly serves admirably the purpose for which it is intended.

Of the remaining Syrian secret society, the Ansaireh, little more is known, but that little is considerably more sinister. The basis of this mysterious society is—ostensibly at all events—religious, being an amalgam of Christian, Jewish and Moslem elements. Their meetings are held under conditions of the greatest secrecy, and this for a reason probably a good deal sounder than those of a good many of the world's secret societies. What has been learnt about the Ansaireh is the fact that their doctrines inculcate extremely licentious practices between their priests and women attending their religious services.

In the mountainous districts of northern Persia there is still to be found a remnant of a once powerful secret society, the Mithraics, named after Mithras, the mighty and beneficent spirit of light, who governed the sun.

The terrifying mysteries of the Mithraics take place deep in a secret underground cavern, where aspirants to initiation are put through the most severe trials before acceptance. Initiates are sworn to the closest secrecy, and no unauthorised person has ever gained admittance to one of these ceremonies. This much, however, is known about them. During one phase of the initiation ceremony the aspirant is provided with

a suit of armour with which to protect himself against the attacks of the giants and monstrous creatures supposed to inhabit the subterranean depths in which the rites are held.

In fact, the initiate is actually attacked, but his assailants are priests of the order and temple officials, disguised as wild beasts, who amid hideous howlings assail him to test his fortitude in the faith.

So terrible are these ceremonies that before now they have been attended with fatal consequences. It is said that the Emperor Commodus actually killed a priest who, in the guise of a tiger, had launched a violent attack upon him.

In China, the very hot-bed of secret organisations, the trend of these societies has been political and anti-social, rather than religious. In ancient Cathay secret societies, or Tongs, were already in existence as far back as the first century of the Christian era, when there arose the secret order of the Pelin-Kiao, or the White Lily, which was founded with the object of restoring the Ming dynasty to the Imperial throne.

Since then, throughout the ages, the crop of secret societies has never failed, either in China proper or in all the numerous Chinese colonies scattered abroad. Their number has been, and still remains legion, and a strong element of mysticism in the ritual of most of them has always helped to dominate and hold together their widely scattered members.

Parts of the British Empire, such as the Straits Settlements, where Chinese form about one-fourth of the population, are honeycombed with secret societies, most of them of a sinister nature, and so astutely organised that all attempts on the part of the Government to suppress them have failed.

Similar conditions prevail in the Dutch colonies of Java and Sumatra, where the Tongs are all-powerful, and practically control the lives of thousands.

In China itself, particularly in the South, in such swarming nests of humanity as Canton, these mysterious organisations actually hold the lives of hundreds of thousands in their power. To these the authority of the Government counts for nothing beside the hidden hand of the Tongs. And many a poor wretch who has been foolish enough to reveal some secret of one of these despotic and mysterious organisations has been sent to his death—sometimes secretly, sometimes quite openly—by a horribly cruel method of execution.

The following description of one of these Tong executions was given to me by a friend who was an eye-witness of the scene. A Chinese furniture-dealer of Canton had sold a secret of one of the Tongs to a rival society. The deal had been discovered, and the culprit had been condemned to death.

The execution was carried out publicly. The victim was chained to a post in an open square, where an excited and vociferous crowd of Chinese, women as well as men, assembled at an early hour, beguiling the time of waiting by firing off squibs and devouring many bowls of rice and pickled fish.

At noon the executioner, carrying a huge broad-bladed knife, arrived, and with this weapon, at a word of command from one of a group of six silk-robed individuals, evidently officials of the injured Tong, this man deftly cut off the prisoner's ears. He then left the square, most of the crowd doing likewise, leaving the wretched victim chained to the post and losing blood copiously.

At sunset the executioner returned; so did the six

officials, and then, again in the presence of a great crowd, the prisoner's nose was slashed off. As before, the bleeding victim was left bound amid his own gore for several hours. Then, at midnight, the executioner returned once more. This time it was intended to cut off the furniture-dealer's arms. The wretched man, however, had by this time fallen in a dead faint, and as of course there could be no entertainment in mutilating an unconscious man, he was left all night, chained to his post.

The following morning the executioner returned to continue the dreadful "Death of a Thousand Cuts," and would undoubtedly have done so had it not been found that by this time the wretched victim was beyond the brutality of his fellow-men.

The overwhelming power of many of the Chinese Tongs reaches far beyond the confines of Asia ; it is as effective in the Chinatown of London or of New York as in Peking or Canton themselves. It is obvious, however, that among Chinese living outside their own country such death-sentences cannot be carried out, even the Tongs being compelled—outwardly, at least—to conform to the laws of the country in which they are operating. But the Chinese are a people of infinite resource, and if the laws of the "foreign devils" interfere with their customs or their amusements they can usually hit upon a way to circumvent those laws.

A remarkable case of the vengeance of an outraged Tong getting the better of the white man's law occurred some years ago in San Francisco. In the Chinese quarter of that cosmopolitan city there lived a mat-maker, a native of Fuchow. This man could neither speak nor understand a word of any language but his own. Never leaving the precincts of Chinatown,

working for Chinese, following the Chinese mode of life in every detail, he—like thousands of his compatriots —practically remained in China, even though his abode happened to be in a far-distant country.

For some reason of his own the mat-maker was so ill-advised as to betray some secret of his Tong, and was summoned before the local Chinese tribunal. He duly appeared before the court, which had been constituted in accordance with Chinese custom and under the ægis of the United States law, which allows a wide latitude to Chinese residents, so long as there is no infringement of any of its ordinances.

The case was heard according to the procedure of the Tong, and the Chinese judge passed the inevitable sentence of death on the accused.

But there the jurisdiction of the Chinese court ceased ; it had not the power to inflict the capital penalty which it had imposed, and had been bound to impose in such circumstances. Whatever happened, however, it was imperative to " save face."

Accordingly the prisoner was bound to a post in the courtroom and made to kneel down. The executioner was called, and he, at the command of the judge, swept aloft a huge sword which, with marvellous dexterity, and yet with sufficient violence, he brought down with a swift slash to within a hairbreadth of the kneeling man's neck, without, however, touching him with it.

The judge then declared that the prisoner had been duly executed according to the law of the Tong, and certified him as being dead. Thereupon everybody—judge, officials, and public—retired from the court, leaving the prisoner tied to the post, but none the worse for his experience.

But the story does not end here. After a time the

"executed" man succeeded in freeing himself from his bonds and returned home. But meanwhile, with the amazing speed with which news travels among Orientals, the word had gone round that the man had paid the penalty of death for his indiscretion. He no longer existed.

The consequence was that wherever the wretched man showed himself, whether at an eating-house, a temple, or a shop of any kind, nobody saw him ; he did not exist ; hence, of course, he could not be seen. And thus it continued for two weeks. If he asked for food or drink, or any other necessity, nobody heard or saw him. He just did not exist, as far as the Chinese inhabitants of San Francisco were concerned. And at the end of the fortnight he actually did cease to exist. The man who had broken the law of his Tong had died of starvation and misery.

The innumerable secret societies of Japan, too, are mainly political in object, as, for example, the immensely powerful Fraternity of Blood, that country's greatest secret organisation.

The Emperor himself is reported to be considerably perturbed over the activities of this sinister Fraternity, which was responsible for the murders of Premier Inukai in 1932 and of the Mitsubishi Bank's Baron Den, and which was also the organiser of the attempt on Baron Wakatsuki, whom it could not forgive for signing the London Naval Treaty.

Members of the society have been condemned to death and given life imprisonment, but so secretly and carefully is it organised that its strength and audacity grow steadily, and now membership is said to include fifty per cent of officers on active service.

Reminiscent of mediæval practices is the rite of

admission to Japan's Fraternity of Blood, which demands that each novice shall thrust a dagger into his arm and let the blood gush freely for several minutes. All commands are blindly executed, cowardice and treason being punished by death ; failure by suicide.

The membership of the Fraternity of Blood is drawn mainly from the Army ; from Japan's civil population come members of the next most important secret society, Koku Ryukai, the Black Dragon. Both favour methods of violence, abolition of parliamentary system, regulation of industry, strong re-armament, Eastern conquest, and the institution of a military dictatorship. Much of their power and success is due to the facts that neither has headquarters, nor organises public demonstrations or processions. Secretly, underground, they work, and on the measure of their success hangs, to who knows what extent, the fate of China and, eventually, the rest of the world.

Japan's Fascist membership now numbers more than two millions. Their programme provides for the restoration of samourism, which means the return of all power to the Emperor.

Samourism was abolished as a political class in reforms sixty years ago, but in spirit it is as strong in Japan as ever. Here, too, numerous secret organisations are working steadily towards a common end. The most powerful society of the samourists is Dai Nippon Kokusui, whose educative measures include sending eight-year-old children alone into graveyards at dead of night so that they may learn to conquer fear.

Among other similar associations the most important is Kokuhousa, directed by Baron Hiranuma, picked out by some as future Dictator of Japan. Hiranuma never appears in public, and never makes a speech. He lives



By courtesy of the British and Foreign Bible Society

SHINTO PRIESTS



By courtesy of the British and Foreign Bible Society

A PERSIAN DERVISH

as a bachelor, and his spartan life has become a legend in Tokio.

All Japan's secret societies are not political, however. Still flourishing, for example, is the powerful secret order named Tenno Dai Sin, which has for its distinguishing emblem the Bull of the Zodiac, and which has been in existence in Japan for many centuries.

The rites of Tenno Dai Sin are enveloped in considerable mystery. The candidate for admission is led through a series of huge artificial spheres formed of movable orbs, representing the revolving planets. On the wall of the meeting-place hangs a gigantic mirror, symbolic of the all-seeing eye of the Creator. Subsequently the neophyte is locked in a room, the door of which is alleged to be guarded by a terrible being, half-god, half-demon, armed with a huge drawn sword.

So nerve-shattering is the ordeal through which an aspirant to this order has to pass that cases have been reported in which a candidate has become so profoundly impressed during his probation that, in the fervour of his emotion, he has refused to quit the chamber in which his initiation took place, and has remained there until he died. Such voluntary martyrs are beatified.

From the little that has been discovered about the Tenno Dai Sin, its worship is evidently some form of the Sun Cult. The god of the sect has twelve apostles, and the sun, which is really its patron and prototype, is believed among the sect to be constantly fighting dread monsters and elemental beings, the enemies of man.

Members of this mysterious society are required to abstain during long periods from animal food and to purify themselves by frequent bathing.

Everywhere throughout Asia the tale is the same.

Secret societies, their inner mysteries jealously guarded from unauthorised eyes, flourish, and have flourished for hundreds of years, from Japan to Poland.

India, that teeming land of mixed and opposed creeds, castes, and peoples, has always been a stronghold of mysterious orders and sects. Thanks to the vigorous action of the British authorities, the most diabolical of all secret societies, the murderous Thugs and their near associates, the Dacoits, have now been exterminated. But until comparatively recently the terrible crimes of Thuggee held practically the whole of India in terror.

The main and undisguised object of Thuggee was that of murder. Their deity was the bloody goddess Kalee, and there is no doubt that originally the murderous crimes of the Thugs were committed from genuinely religious motives. But gradually decay set in, and from being an act of faith and sacrifice to the goddess they professed to serve, the object of the Thugs' countless murders degenerated to that of wholesale plunder.

The inner mysteries of Thuggee and the worship of Kalee have remained wrapt in mystery, but the methods by which the goddess' victims were obtained were too widespread to remain secret for long. The members of the sect were experts at throwing the noose, by which means they sent more than ten thousand persons to their death in the course of twenty years.

Once a victim or group of victims—often a party of travellers—had been selected, the Thugs would seek permission to travel under their protection. Being invariably unarmed—in a land where to travel unarmed was to court disaster at the hands of the robbers who infested the wilder parts of all the roads—and being,

moreover, gentle in manner and appearance, the permission they sought was seldom refused them.

The whole party would then journey on together, becoming more and more friendly as time went on. Several days would sometimes pass before there occurred a favourable opportunity for bringing off a coup, and then from under their robes would come the Thugs' deadly cord, and swiftly and silently the victims would be strangled on the spot.

In one recorded case a party of Thugs accompanied a family of eleven persons for twenty days, for a distance of over two hundred miles, and then murdered all eleven. So secretly and effectively were the Thugs organised, and so deft and mysterious was their method of procedure, that until the Government seriously set itself to exterminate the sect, few of its members were ever discovered, to be made to pay the penalty of their crimes.

Sharing with Kalee the distinction of being the bloodiest deity in the pantheon of Brahminism—which pantheon contains the astonishing number of 300,000 different gods and goddesses—is the red god Siva, the Destroyer, the third member of the Brahmin trinity of which Brahma and Vishnu are the first two. It is known that Brahminism contains a highly mysterious Inner Brotherhood, in whose affairs the secret, and bloody, rites of Siva play an important part. The utmost secrecy surrounds these mysterious rites, but it is known that one aspect of them is that of phallic worship, while another important ceremony includes blood sacrifice—at one time human.

Throughout the ages, and to the present day, an aspirant to the inner society and dignity of Brahminism has had to go through the severe trial which seems an essential part of initiation into secret societies through-

out the East, and, indeed, the world over. These trials take place in hidden subterranean vaults, the final stage being reached when the keeping of the sacred name is entrusted to the neophyte. Before the coming of the British in India the revealing of this sacred name, except at secret ceremonies, was punished with death.

A remarkable example of the extreme lengths to which the ordeals of initiation into many Asiatic secret societies are carried is provided by the terrific trials undergone by aspirants to the order of the Magi, a Persian secret society whose members were not only the priests of the Zoroastrian occult science but constituted a monarchy, with royal powers.

To the present day the Parsees, decimated by the Arab conquerors of Persia and scattered through India, still cling to their ancient Zoroastrian faith, and although they have by this time been shorn of much of their former impressiveness, their initiation ceremonies are still very complicated, the neophyte being faced with a painful ordeal before he is accepted into the secret circle of the sacred fire.

In Persia, prior to the Arab invasion, the initiate's trials were appalling. These culminated in a fast of forty days, passed in a subterranean vault amid a sepulchral silence and in utter solitude, where the only sound he was occasionally permitted to hear was the distant roaring and growling of wild beasts, which were kept in hidden caves for the purpose of trying the candidates' nerves.

From this gloomy prison the initiate was eventually conducted into a pitch-dark cavern, which was lit up from time to time by weird flashes of cunningly manipulated lightning, accompanied by deafening thunderclaps. Next he was led through a labyrinth of vaults,

in each of which he was confronted with some frightful scene representing the torments of the damned in Hell.

Finally, if the candidate emerged from these trials with his sanity intact he had to swear a terrible oath that he would keep secret the rites of Zoroaster, after which the ineffable name of God was entrusted to him, and he was received into the faith.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE WAS THE GARDEN OF EDEN?

THE geographical position of the Garden of Eden is a question which has exercised many keen and inquiring minds down the centuries ; and certainly the determination of the actual scene of " man's first disobedience " would be of the utmost interest from many points of view.

Attempts have been made to fix the site of the Garden in several parts of the world, but none of the arguments in favour of this position or that has been particularly convincing. It was almost undoubtedly in the Eastern Hemisphere, however—mankind, as we know it, reaching the West only considerably after his establishment in the East—and nothing seems more probable than that the original Eden was situated in the lost continent of the Indian Ocean.

For although everybody has heard of Atlantis, the long-drowned Continent which, it has been inferred, lies deep beneath the heaving waters of mid-Atlantic, it is not nearly so widely realised that Asiatic waters also are believed to conceal a mysterious lost country.

Many people believe that stories of " lost continents " are purely legendary, survivals of a more literal-minded age when men invented facts to fit in with their own theories about the mysterious universe in which they

lived, where few people bothered about the authentication of a story as long as the story was sufficiently interesting, and where succeeding generations easily accepted their ancestors' inventions as truth.

Many such "shots in the dark" came surprisingly close to the truth, however, and modern science has satisfied itself that the whirling planet which is our world did not always wear the face it presents to us to-day. Indications of this fact are too plain to be read in any other way. Here is a curious fact, for example.

Study of the migrations of fish has shown that in their annual journey from the Atlantic into the North Sea these fish still take the long route up the West Coast of Ireland, round the north of Scotland and right down the East Coast, following by instinct the path taken by their ancestors many thousands of years ago when Britain was still part of the Continent. They do not know the existence of the English Channel.

How do we know that this is the reason for the unnecessarily long journey made by these excessively conservative denizens of the sea? We know it to be so because when scientists of the French Bureau which deals with sea fishing went to trace the original estuary of the Rhine they found it off the Shetland Islands. The River Forth was, in fact, originally a tributary of the Rhine.

At a joint meeting of the Royal Astronomical and Geological Societies, in 1935, Greenwich Observatory was accused of the very serious crime of shifting its longitude. The most romantic of all geological themes was being discussed—the widely accepted belief that the continents of the world are actually rafts of granite

floating on the denser, semi-fluid crust of the earth.

Britain is known to have moved as much as ten feet during the last fifty years. There seems to be no doubt that America has been " taken for a ride " at a rate of nearly a mile a century ; while Wegener, the German scientist, has produced evidence to show that Greenland is moving westwards at twenty yards a year.

The layman may feel as sceptical at times about these small distances as he is, proverbially, about the " billions " of miles of the astronomers ; but so amazingly accurate are modern methods of observation and calculation that the longitudes of all the principal observatories in the world are known to within a hundredth of a second of arc—or about ten feet.

From the rate of the westward movement of America it is plain that she was tethered to the Old World until comparatively recent times. Every schoolboy has noticed how closely the opposite shores of the Atlantic Ocean correspond : they fit together like a jig-saw puzzle, even the rocks and fossils agreeing. And it was only the day before yesterday (as geologists think of a mere gross of million years ago) that the big " break-away " occurred.

Apart from the perversity of the fishes who refuse to have anything to do with the " new-fangled notion " of the English Channel, the animal kingdom provides many interesting evidences of the shape of lands forgotten. The periodical behaviour of the South African springboks is unmistakable evidence of the fact that South America, which still contains numerous " South African " animals, was once a part of the African continent. For hundreds of generations the springbok of the Karroo had been in the habit of pushing westwards

in search of fresh grazing ground whenever the problem of over-population troubled them. This habit became an instinct which remains sufficiently strong at the present day to cause thousands of them to rush into the Atlantic Ocean and drown themselves every twelve years or so.

The well-known peculiarity of the lemmings, the forest rats of Norway, provides a similar case. Periodically, hordes of lemmings still rush in where their racial instinct tells them Greenland was ; and they perish in the Greenland Sea.

Human beings, too, have been liable to recognisable traces of race memory ; and viewed in this light, and in consideration of what is now known of the changes which have taken place in the configuration of the earth's surface, stories of " lost continents " appear in a far less improbable light.

It is probable, in fact, that it is to some such long-inherited racial memory that surviving stories of a lost continent of the Indian Ocean are due. Such stories have existed at least ever since the first white men discovered and began to exploit the rich treasure-house of the East—no one can say how long before then they are traceable. The story of the Flood, at least, is actual enough. Whatever one may think about the book of Genesis' account of Noah and his unwieldy craft, mention of the occurrence is too universal among the world's mythologies to leave room for doubt that at some time in the dim and distant past the Flood did actually occur.

What is more probable, then, than that the Deluge recorded in the scriptural legends of practically every people in the world was nothing else but the great " break-up " of the earth's main continental landmass, and further that at least one continent then

disappeared for ever beneath the waters of the inrushing ocean?

The existence of this vanished land, which has now come to be known as Lemuria, was long considered in the West to be purely mythical. To-day it is established as a scientific fact. Writing in 1899, Philip Lutley Sclater, F.R.S., a former secretary to the Zoological Society of London, pointed out that certain species of lemur—a small mammal, in appearance a combination of cat and monkey—are absolutely confined to Madagascar and its adjoining islets. It is, in fact, mainly the presence of these peculiar animals which constitutes nearly one half of the total mammal fauna of Madagascar and which renders the Malagasy fauna so very different from that of any other part of the earth's surface.

It is obviously impossible that these little furry creatures could swim the Indian Ocean from Africa to India; and, as Sclater pointed out, the fact of members of this very restricted genus occurring elsewhere only in these two countries "would seem to show that the ancient 'Lemuria,' as the hypothetical continent which was originally the home of the lemurs has been termed, must have extended across the Indian Ocean and Indian Peninsula to the farther side of the Bay of Bengal, and over the great islands of the Indian Archipelago."

Modern science has now established to its own satisfaction that Sclater's Lemuria is, in fact, part of the great antediluvian continent of Gondwanaland. This latter name, derived from Gwondana, a district of Central India, was given by Suss to the inferred Palæozoic continent that, before the great break-away, spanned the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans, incidentally including Ihering's Arch-hellenis uniting Africa with Brazil.

Geological comparisons, and also those of zoology, and botany, make the actuality of this continent appear unquestionable. For the distribution and affinities of rocks and fossils, birds, beasts and plants in Patagonia, Africa, Asia, and Australasia all point to the former unity of these areas. If the lemurs of Madagascar could not cross the ocean, neither could the manati of West Africa and the Amazon, or many of the fresh-water fishes, blind snakes, birds, geckos, scorpions, and decapods which correspond so strangely to-day in their distribution among the countries named.

Gondwanaland, in fact, probably included all (except North-West) Africa, Madagascar, peninsula India, Australia, Tasmania, Antarctica, the Falklands, and all of South America except the extreme West and North-West.

The mysterious Lemuria, the vanished country which has puzzled and intrigued the minds of men for so many centuries, really did exist, then ; it still does—or what is left of it—hidden below the indigo waters of the Indian Ocean. Is it possible to discover anything more than the mere fact of its existence about this forgotten land, which very possibly contained the Garden of Eden ? Has the enveloping ocean left no shred of evidence to help us in our efforts to reconstruct some pictures of that ill-fated country ?

In approaching such a subject one has, obviously, little to work on but conjectures ; but it is a fact that the Indian Ocean does contain something, a group of islands, of such a peculiar nature as to give rise to very reasonable speculations as to whether here does not lie the clue that we seek. I make no claims for the theory I am about to offer you. I propose merely to present the facts, and leave others to form their own conclusions.

Now it is reasonable to suppose that when the Flood swept over the land, upon the great break-up of the continent of Gondwanaland, the highest peaks of that continent might have remained uncovered when the waters had reached their final level, forming what would then appear as a number of islands. Are there, then, any islands in the Indian Ocean which afford any evidence that they might once have constituted the peaks of some vanished continental land-mass ?

The geological and other natural features of most of the islands in this ocean definitely rule them out from any such possibility, but, about 575 miles north of Madagascar, lies a group of islands and islets, some ninety odd in all, which are in several respects unique of their kind. This little archipelago is known as the Seychelles.

The islands under the Seychelles Government have a total area of 156 square miles, there being, in addition, 40 to 50 square miles of coral banks within the bounds of the colony. The main islands, with two exceptions, lie towards the centre of a large submarine bank, and are all within the 50 fathoms line. They consist of granite ; and granite is essentially a continental rock. These islands, it is significant to note, form the most isolated masses of such rock in the world.

The Seychelles are almost unique in that they have no human history. When first discovered—probably by the Portuguese, for the earliest map of the archipelago is marked on a Portuguese chart dated 1502—the islands were entirely without inhabitants ; nor were the slightest traces of any former human habitation found there. Although eventually colonised by Mauritian and Bourbon Creoles, and to-day supporting a weird mixture of races —British, Negro, Chinese, Indian, etc.—no evidence

has been found of the archipelago ever having possessed any indigenous inhabitants.

It may have been known to early Arab traders, though it is altogether unlikely that its existence can ever have been a matter of common knowledge to their navigators. To the Malays the archipelago would have been too far south for any wind or current to have shown them its existence ; while, if known to the Arabs, one can only conclude that its inhospitable, waterless reefs and islets towards Madagascar caused a shunning of the whole region and a course right along the African littoral. Yet the absence of indigenous inhabitants from Mauritius, Chagos, Bourbon, Rodriguez, and the Seychelles, not to mention a host of smaller islets and groups in this area of the Indian Ocean, is an extraordinary fact as compared with the vigorous and dense populations which at some time or other dwelt on nearly every islet of the Pacific Ocean.

Yet another respect in which the Seychelles fail to conform with any other portion of the earth's surface is in the matter of their fauna and flora. For both among the wild life and the vegetation of the islands are found species and genera peculiar to the archipelago. Best known of these is the famous coco-de-mer, *Lodoices sechellarum*, a palm tree indigenous nowhere else in the world but in Praslin, the second largest island of the group.

For many years the origin of this great double coco-nut, a foot long, the largest and heaviest fruit in the world, which was found floating in the Indian Ocean by Portuguese explorers, remained a mystery. Then, by chance, it was traced to the beautiful palms of Seychelles. It has since successfully been introduced to Curieuse, another island of the group, but all

attempts to transplant it to other parts of the world have failed.

We have, then, a group of islands, unique not only in the area in which they occur, but in the whole world ; consisting geologically of the essentially continental granite rock formation ; situated on a vast submarine bank in the area known to have been occupied by the vanished continent of Lemuria ; containing animals and vegetation found in no other part of the world ; and further remarkable for having absolutely no traceable human history.

To the writer, at least, the combination of evidence in favour of the Seychelles constituting all that is left of the lost continent of the Indian Ocean, the solution to what is probably the greatest Asiatic mystery of all is as convincing as any evidence on such a question is likely to be.

With regards the possibility that here, too, lay the site of the Garden of Eden, evidence is, of course, considerably more difficult to adduce. The description of the first recorded visitor to the islands—John Jourdain, who called there in 1609—is quite strikingly like that of the Garden, at all events. In particular, Mahé, the largest and most central island, is stated by this early visitor in his Journal, to have had much large and " very firme timber." . . . " It is a very good, refreshing place for wood, water, coker nutts, fish and fowle, without any fear or danger, except the allagartes ; for you cannot discerne that ever any people had bene there before us."

No less famous a man than General Gordon is among those who have subscribed to this theory. When stationed at Mauritius, Gordon visited the Seychelles, and was so struck by their beauty that he wrote of

them : " I verily believe that I have found the site of the Garden of Eden ! " Nor was this remark a mere hyperbolic expression of admiration. The General developed his theory with maps and plans, to show how the four rivers that entered the Garden once flowed down the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, afterwards pursuing their joint course through a thousand miles of what was in the age of man's innocence the dry bed of the present Indian Ocean.

In view of what is now known of the changes which have taken place in the courses of the world's rivers—for example, in that of the Rhine, as already mentioned—these maps appear to convey a perfectly reasonable and probable claim.

On the face of the evidence, it would at least seem that the proposition that the Seychelles are no other than the protruding peaks of the mountains of the drowned continent of Lemuria, and that possibly, even, they once shadowed the very Garden of Eden itself, is reasonably tenable. Let us, then, attempt to reconstruct, from this inferred survival, some picture of what that land was like in the days when the world was young.

Of the lowlands and borders of this forgotten land we can deduce nothing : the waters of the Indian Ocean keep their secret well. But, judging from the physical geography of the largest and most central range (Mahé) of what we may term the Seychelles Mountains, the country presented a mountainous backbone running from north to south, and rising abruptly from the thickly-wooded valleys to a very considerable height. Even to-day the highest peak of the island of Mahé rises to nearly 3000 feet above sea-level. This one range is nearly 17 miles long and from 4 to 7 in breadth.

The second main mountain range—now Praslin

Island—must have been considerably smaller, the total extent of Praslin now being only some 8 miles long and from 1 to 3 miles broad. The remaining peaks would have been mainly isolated, none of the remaining islands of the archipelago exceeding 1½ square miles in extent.

In addition to the four chief rivers which, if we are to believe Gordon and the Eden theory, flowed through the land, the country was evidently well watered, many torrents still descending the heights of Mahé and Praslin.

Unless these mountains have changed out of all recognition since the Flood swept over this land, luxuriant forests climbed high up their flanks from the fertile valleys below, the mangroves, coco-nut palms and pandanus of the lowlands gradually giving way to the banyan, the capucin—like the coco-de-mer, found nowhere else in the world—and a profusion of palms, shrubs and climbing tree ferns.

A beautiful land it must have been, and a kindly one : no need for Adam to have delved or Eve to have spun. Food there was, and still is, for the taking ; a climate healthy and equable, undisturbed by the terrible hurricanes which occasionally devastate nearby Reunion and Mauritius ; the only wild creature from which danger threatened in a country teeming with wild things, the crafty crocodile.

What the " angel with the flaming sword " can have been we have no means of knowing, though in this region nothing seems more likely than that this was some volcanic disturbance. Inland cliffs on Mahé, say the geologists, indicate a recent volcanic uplift of some 200 feet ; so volcanic action is at least not unknown in these " mountains."

And what of the "Tree of Knowledge"? Can it be that this was no other than *Lodoicea sechellarum*, the double coco-nut of Praslin? Certain it is that this tree grows, nor has ever grown anywhere else in the world, and certain, also, that its fruit is the fruit of long life. The native princes of India pay fabulous sums for it as a remedy against senility, and so great was the demand for it at one time that it was found necessary to protect the trees by law in order to prevent their total disappearance.

These may be wild theories, it is true, based as they are on inferences with which everyone will not agree; but however that may be, and quite apart from the possibility of the Seychelles being all that remains of a drowned Pacific continent, these islands remain islands of romance and mystery. No one can explain their surprising granite framework, the secret of the beautiful palms which grow there and nowhere else, the mystery of the lemurs' original home, or the equally intriguing mystery of these islands' immediate past.

If the story of that past ever does come to be told, it is likely to be romantic enough. The seas about the southern coast of Africa were a favourite hunting-ground of the buccaneers of the end of the eighteenth century, and there are legends in the Seychelles, among the older Mauritian families, of the group having been the headquarters of many an adventurer.

Such gentry, for obvious reasons of their own, were not in the habit of advertising the whereabouts of their lairs, and little is known for certain about these islands' piratical past. On Praslin and Frigate Islands, however, were found the remains of structures quite probably pre-European; and the tradition is that there was in

Praslin a pirate settlement and station for repairs, and that one of the bays on the north side, Côte d'Or—significant name—of Curieuse, was used for this purpose. There are certainly, on these islands, the remains of works which might well have been of the nature of forts, and also obvious artificialities in boat channels through reefs and at landing-places.

There was published in 1897 a most interesting pamphlet entitled *Histoire et Description des Isles Seychelles*, by Charles Anastas, which, though it omits to quote the source of the information it contains, gives most circumstantial details of the early history of the group. Of the European pirates who followed the Arabs, Anastas mentions the names of Boynot, Taylor, Coudent, Egland, and Olivier le Tasseur.

As general evidence of their statements, the people of Praslin point out the burnt stumps of massive trees, and to marks of fire on the double coco-nut. The former cannot be dated, but, taking known rates of growth of the latter, we have some evidence of fires at least two hundred years ago.

It is easy to picture them now, the swaggering boats' crews landing on these pleasant shores, the roystering and the deeds of infamy, as the pirate crews of yesterday lolled beneath the palms and swigged at the milk of the great double coco-nuts. Hidden treasure still remains one of the commonest legends among these islands, and who can doubt that at least one hoard of doubloons or diamonds, pillaged plate or time-tarnished pieces of eight lies waiting here for the vanished hand that never will come to reclaim it?

More than one search has been made for these fabled riches, but nothing has ever been found. If the eighteenth-century "gangsters" who careened their

infamous ships among these island bays did leave any of their ill-gotten gains behind them, those hoards remain to add another mystery to the record of the islands, which, from whatever angle you choose to regard them, offer themselves as mystery isles indeed.

CHAPTER V

HIDDEN TRIBES OF ASIA

UPON a vast continent, the amazing diversity of whose peoples is equalled only by their teeming numbers, and where the geographical features make travel and its resulting human intercourse practically impossible over many wide areas, stories of secret and mysterious tribes, hidden among impregnable mountains, within the gloomy depths of unexplored forests, or upon remote islands, have little that is incredible about them. Such stories are, in fact, inevitable.

Theoretically, the white man's rule is now everywhere. But even to-day, in Asia, large tracts of steamy, leech-infested jungle and swamp, and many hidden valleys among the world's highest mountains, remain almost inaccessible, and, for the white man, practically uninhabitable. The forests of Indo-China, the most dangerous country in the world for example, are still virtually unexplored, and likely to remain so. But man, like the ubiquitous sparrow, seems irrepressible ; save in the areas immediately surrounding the Poles, humanity of some colour, race, and creed appears everywhere.

What more likely, then, than that a tribe or people settled for many generations in a tract of country cut off from intercourse with the rest of the world by geographical barriers, should remain practically undiscovered for centuries, chanced on only occasionally by

some lost traveller or far-wandering hunter, from whom weird tales and fragments of the truth percolate tortuously through to the outer world ?

The number of such tales is, indeed, legion ; but as most of them inevitably emanate from native sources, and concern—as obviously they only can do—areas almost entirely unknown to the white man, the difficulty is to sort fact from fiction. The labyrinth intricacies of the Asiatic mind must be encountered to be believed, while the imagination of the average Oriental is usually as fertile as it is unbridled.

It follows that many of the stories that one hears of unknown and more or less mysterious Asiatic tribes are, either in whole or in part, a mixture of legend, superstition, and imagination. There is, for example, a story which still occasionally flickers into brief and nebulous life, of a mysterious tribe of white natives hidden in the Aru (or Aroe) Islands, off New Guinea. Details concerning these people, however, are practically unobtainable, and such evidence of their existence as has been offered has been extremely conflicting ; nor is there any authenticated record of any of the tribe having been actually seen. Their existence, like that of many other such " mysterious " tribes, remains entirely problematical.

That such virtually unknown tribes, mysterious survivals of an ancient and unchanging past, do exist in various hidden corners of Asia is, however, beyond dispute. There is said to be no smoke without fire, and most of the native stories of such semi-fabulous peoples have at least some slender foundation of fact ; some of them are actual facts themselves.

Everyone is familiar with the Greek legend of the Amazons, a race of militant females—whether entirely

legendary or not, who can say at this distance of time ?—having a kingdom near the Black Sea. In art, these magnificent creatures are represented as armed and mounted on horses, which they rode in triumph over their fallen foes. They visited other tribes in order to propagate their race, but only their female offspring were allowed to survive, the men-children born to them being invariably killed.

These Amazons of the Ancient World have at least one counterpart in present-day Asia. For, hidden away in the almost impenetrable forests at the back of the mountain of Korbu, in the Upper Perak Valley, Federated Malay States, there is known to be a mysterious tribe consisting entirely of women ; a tribe which, except for the absence of horses among them, appears to approximate in every way to the Amazons of the Greeks.

These singular people, concerning whom all accounts tally so closely as practically to eliminate doubt, are reported to be strikingly handsome of face and form, taller than the men of the Peninsula, paler in colour, stronger and bolder. Men are rigorously excluded from the tribe, who, however, manage to bear numerous offspring. It appears that it is the custom of these women, from time to time, to dance naked in a glade of the forest, when—according to the Semang Malays, their nearest neighbours—these offspring are begotten upon them by the evening wind.

However the latter fact may be—and most people will probably incline to the theory of the Ancient Greeks to account for the reproduction of a celibate race—the fact of the dancing would seem to be established. Only the girl-children are brought up, the boy babies being killed at birth.

With dancing, hunting seems to be the main occupation of these Malayan Amazons, and their means of support. The fact that they have attained to a high state of proficiency in this pursuit is attested by the Semangs—no mean hunters themselves—who admit that the bows and blow-pipes of the Amazons, which they occasionally find in the forest, are larger and more beautifully carved than their own and, moreover, of truer aim.

But unfortunate is the man, white or brown, who meets these accomplished women, or dares to penetrate into those parts of the jungle which they regard as their own. The women have no welcome for the stranger in their midst, and are said to be entirely ruthless in their treatment of intruders. The Semangs fear them exceedingly, and are at considerable pains to avoid trespassing on their domain.

There appears to be no record of a white man who has actually seen any of these mysterious Amazons, though most people who know the Peninsula at all intimately have heard of the tribe and accept their existence as a fact. Of the numerous native accounts of the women, I have selected the following as being among the most circumstantial and the best authenticated. It was given to Sir Hugh Clifford by an old Semang bearer, over a forest camp-fire, during one of Sir Hugh's official trips into the interior. This ancient native claimed to be the only member of his tribe who had ever seen one of the dreaded Amazons and lived to tell the tale.

Many years ago, when he was a young man, said the Semang, he and his two brothers were hunting in the forest, and had strayed beyond the limits of their own hunting-grounds in pursuit of a wounded deer. Un-

thinking of anything but their quarry, they penetrated deeper and deeper into the dim intricacies of the now unfamiliar jungle.

At length they came upon their deer, lying dead beside a stream ; only to find, however, that it had been killed by no arrow of theirs, but by a larger and altogether different shaft. As the three bent over the strange arrow, wondering from whose bow it could have been loosed, a sudden sound put all thoughts of deer and arrow out of their minds and made them grasp their own weapons apprehensively. It was a loud, threatening cry, in a strange tongue.

Turning in the direction from which this menacing sound had come, continued the narrator, he was horrified to behold a gigantic form, as of a pale-skinned woman, clad in the skins of animals and armed with a heavy bow. At the same moment one of his brothers fell beside him, pierced through the throat with an arrow.

Waiting for no more, the Semang had turned and fled for his life, never stopping until he reached his own camp. Neither of his brothers was ever seen again ; and it was well known, said the native, that the mysterious women killed all strangers at sight.

Sir Hugh Clifford himself, than whom few men can have had a better knowledge of the workings of the Malay mind, says of this extraordinary affair that he definitely believes that his informant actually did see something weird and uncanny at the back of the Gunond Korbu ; and " that the keen eyes of a jungle-dwelling Semang should not be able clearly to recognise anything that he should encounter in the forests of the Peninsula is, in itself, a miracle."

The facts of the disappearance of the Semang's two

brothers are, of course, capable of bearing quite a different interpretation to that which the man put upon them in his story ; but his description of the stalwart, fair-skinned woman and her accoutrements, tallies in every detail with other similar accounts of these Amazonian females current in the Peninsula. And what makes the story even more curious is the fact that, even in the wildest parts of the Malay States, the natives do not shoot one another on sight, whatever they may do to bands of marauding Malays ; nor do serious quarrels ever arise between them over the division of a little fresh meat.

And so the mysterious fact remains that, though there is no official knowledge of any such tribe in the interior of the Malay Peninsula—anthropologists have no information to give us on the subject of the Amazons of Malaya—there would seem to be ample evidence that, somewhere amid the trackless forests of Perak, there contrives to exist an unknown tribe, whose outstanding characteristics are their bold and warlike nature and the fact that they consist entirely of women.

Barbarous and savage though these mysterious women may be, their savagery is of a like nature to that of the creature in the French Zoological Gardens, whose cage is said to have borne the timely warning : " *Cet animal est dangereux ; il se defend !* " Their savagery lies only in defending themselves and their hunting-grounds from the intrusion of strangers ; they do not appear to be a warlike people or in any way aggressive, if left to themselves.

It is this characteristic, no doubt, coupled with the fact that the gloomy and impenetrable jungles which they have made their home can be of no conceivable use to anyone else, that has enabled this mysterious

tribe to preserve such exceptional obscurity in a world whose two guiding principles have long been those of "smash and grab" and publicity.

There is, in fact, something strangely admirable about these magnificently formed women, an independence and self-sufficiency, a competency, and a racial pride which can hardly fail to win respect—however one may deplore the Amazons' treatment of perfectly innocent wanderers into their preserve. The full truth about them —their origin, nature, and manner of living—remains one of the most fascinating mysteries of the Malayan jungles. For on these questions we are as ignorant to-day as when these Amazons were first heard of.

Very different is the reputation of the second of Asia's mystery tribes. From the Province of Travancore, Southern India, there come from time to time weird stories of an unknown tribe of horrible, hairy dwarfs, who dwell in huts high up in the branches of trees, in the farthest depths of the jungle. There is no official record of the existence of these people, but a sufficient body of evidence has gradually accumulated to make it as certain as such queer aspects of the East ever can be, that some such tribe actually does exist.

As far as existing evidence would show, the *Pillai-mansen*, or tiger-men, as they are called in the district they inhabit (though, from all descriptions, ape-men would seem a more apt description), seem to lack a single redeeming feature. Hairy, short, and altogether ape-like, these mysterious people wear no clothing of any sort, and appear to communicate with one another only by signs.

Their general description, in fact, tallies closely with that of the orang-oûtan, the great, hairy, anthropoid ape, whose name is Malay for "man of the woods."

The habitat of the orang-outan, however, is limited to Borneo and Sumatra; nor does the fauna of India include any ape of a size in any way comparable with the descriptions of these unknown dwarfs.

Another piece of evidence which seems definitely to rule out the possibility of these "tiger-men" being merely monstrous apes, is the fact that they are reported to be particularly partial to human flesh. The Mudevars, or hill-men, of Travancore, assert that whenever the dwarfs succeed in capturing a man they kill and eat him; the Mudevars, in their turn, killing a "tiger-man" whenever possible. Now not even the African gorilla, most terrible and largest of all the apes, is known to eat human victims; though many a man, of course, has been caught and crushed to pieces by these mighty brutes.

Baroness Rosenberg, late of Devicolum, Madras Presidency, gave the following account of the mysterious "tiger-men" of India. It was given to her by one Chirringan, chief of a hill village in Travancore. Chirringan is almost undoubtedly the only man who has been captured by the *pillai-mansen* and escaped with his life.

"I am now an old man," confided this exceptionally fortunate individual to the Baroness, "my hair is white, my eye no longer the keenest to locate game on the distant hills. Yet I am still Chief of my village. I have been Chief for many, many years now, and I will tell you how I became Chief.

"Long ago, when I was yet a boy, I was for the first time allowed to accompany my father on a hunting expedition into the forest. We set off at dawn, and camped that night in a cave, descending next day to the lower ranges beyond (now called Cardamom Hills).

Here we built a hut, where I passed several days of delightful excitement, following my father as he crept after a herd of elephants, or lying flat on a rock watching a tiger stalk and kill his prey. My father pointed out to me the kind of trees likely to contain the best honey, and taught me to climb and extract the honeycomb safely.

" One day I was left alone with another lad, the son of my father's companion, and this boy climbed a tall tree containing a particularly large honey-comb. Suddenly, as I stood watching my companion's ascent, I felt my arm grasped tightly from behind, and found myself in the grasp of what I at first took for two large monkeys, so unlike human beings did they appear.

" These strange creatures began dragging me away, for I was perfectly powerless in their sinewy, vice-like grip. My terrified screams at once attracted my companion's attention, and on seeing my predicament he cried out in alarm : ' It is the dreadful *pillai-mansen!* They are taking you away to eat you. Ah, woe is me ! '

" This terrifying intelligence was the last I heard of my friend, as I was hurried away by my fearsome-looking captors into the depths of the forest. Remembering all that my father had told me about these horrible, hairy dwarfs who dwelt in nests in the tops of trees, wore no clothing, and seemed to converse only by signs, I tried to keep up my heart by telling myself that my father and his friend would surely rescue me. But the probability became more and more doubtful as we got ever deeper into the almost impenetrable jungle.

" For a couple of hours I was partly dragged, partly carried along between my captors, when at last a halt was made below a group of tall, straight trees. Here the dwarfs produced some twisted cane, and with it tied my

hands firmly together behind my back, fastening me thus to one of the trees.

" Then the creatures proceeded to climb the same tree. Above my head I espied several large clusters of thatch, like huge birds' nests, and I noticed that there were one or two similar clusters on each of the surrounding trees, wedged between the stoutest branches and the trunk. There were the same bundles of thatch on about half a dozen of the nearest trees, and evidently this was the aerial village of the tiger-people ; for after a while I saw rough, hairy faces peering down at me from these tree-top houses, relishing, I suppose, the prospect of a human repast.

" Presently my captors, descending the tree again, gave a curious, bird-like call ; and at once, from all the huts I had noticed dark forms began to descend. Soon I was surrounded by a curious group of men and women, all hairy and repulsive, all short, wiry and monkey-like, peering at me with hungry, gleaming eyes, through shaggy, overhanging hair matted with mud.

" Almost terrified out of my wits, I could utter no sound, and made sure that each moment would be my last. Just then, however, a new group of four or five tiger-men appeared from out of the forest, dragging with them the slain body of a jungle-sheep (a species of roe-deer). At the sight of the new-comers, the twelve or fifteen people surrounding me made a wild rush at the kill and began tearing it frantically to pieces and devouring the meat raw ; while those who had brought it came over and examined me with grimaces of horrible joy. One of them prodded me in the ribs with a twig—to judge my plumpness, I imagine—while another suddenly swung a strange weapon round and round his

head. This consisted of a large stone, fastened by long strips of twisted hide to a stout stick.

"This weapon, I understood in a flash, was to slay me; and with closed eyes I shrank back as close as I could to the tree to which I was tied, and awaited my doom. Suddenly, however, there came that strange, bird-like cry again, and opening my eyes I beheld every one of the tiger-men scampering wildly back to their tree-top huts, alarmed, apparently, by some sound which I had failed to hear.

"The last of my fearful captors had scarcely disappeared from sight, when two white men appeared, armed with guns and accompanied by hunting dogs, terrifying me almost as much as had the tiger-men, for these were the first white men I had ever seen. My fears were groundless, however, for the new-comers swiftly unbound me, and treated me with every kindness—though when I asked them if they were not going to slay the *pillai-mansen* they only laughed.

"The Englishmen, for such I now know them to have been, restored me to my own village; and when we arrived, all the women and children, so terrified were they by the sight of men with white faces, ran away and hid in the jungle. My great-uncle, the Chief, however, advanced and gazed at the white men. Then he began to chant the legend of the white-faced men who had once before, long ages ago, appeared in these mountains and been courteously treated and guided by our ancestors. It was prophesied that when they appeared a second time they would create a settlement up here, and that the Mudevar who first found them should be Chief. That is how I became Chief, for it was I who first found the white men."

This extraordinary story is circumstantial, to say the

least of it ; and it appears to have left no doubts at all as to its genuineness in the mind of the Baroness Rosenberg. Chirringan, she says, was an extremely shrewd and intelligent man, the last person in India to be frightened into imagining such a story ; nor is it easy to see what possible motive he could have had for inventing it.

With regard to the legend referred to by Chirringan's great-uncle, it is a fact that Tavernier, in his *Travels*, speaks of the adventures of two Europeans who escaped from captivity somewhere on the western coast of India, and who worked their way across big mountains covered with impenetrable jungle and infested with leeches and all kinds of noxious animals, until they got down to the plains and eventually reached Madras, half dead from their terrible privations. This happened in the seventeenth century, and there is, of course, no proof definitely to connect these two white men with those of the Mudevar legend. The parallels are, however, close enough to be interesting.

Chirringan's story gives a fairly complete picture of the appearance, nature, and habits of the " tiger-men " dwarfs ; and it is interesting to note that, about fifty years ago, a white man travelling through Travancore also encountered this mysterious tribe. The European seems to have had considerably less opportunity of studying the people than had Chirringan, but his description, as it was recorded soon afterwards, tallies exactly with that given by the Mudevar chief many years later.

At the same time, the tribe has never been definitely located or identified. If this could be done—and assuming that it still survives—it is even possible that this unknown colony, dwelling secretly in the heart of the most important dominion of the British Empire, might

supply the "missing link" in the chain of man's supposed descent from the apes.

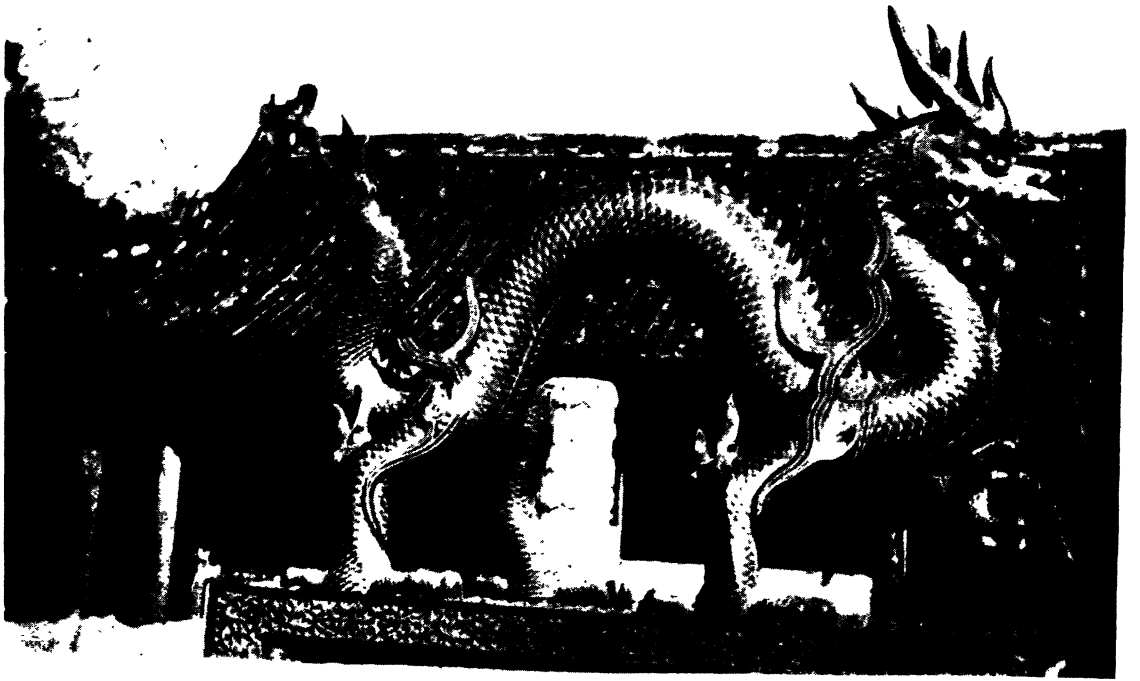
As things are at present, however, the existence of this weird tribe, together with that of the remarkable Amazons of the Malay Peninsula, seems likely to remain among the most baffling of Asia's remaining mysteries.

Stories of mysterious white peoples, living unknown in various parts of Asia, have cropped up again and again. Some of these "white" natives, on being eventually traced, have proved to be no more than obvious albinos. Albinos are regarded as accursed by many primitive peoples, and, being turned out of their tribes for that reason, have been driven to form little communities of "white" natives in several parts of the world. Other so-called white peoples have proved not to be white at all. The Chinese, for example, are regarded in India as being white.

Nevertheless, our knowledge of the descent of man and of the composition of his various races, is not complete, and it remains quite possible that hitherto unrecognised white tribes do exist in regions believed to be inhabited solely by coloured peoples.

Persian and Arab travellers in the ninth century A.D. reported at Bussora that there dwelt in the kingdom of Thafec, on the west coast of India, a race of women, very beautiful, and fair-complexioned; pleasant companions for a man; "not only the most beautiful in India, but described in erotic books as possessing special powers of giving pleasure to men, and for whom merchants pay exorbitant prices." So says Reinaud in his *Relation des Voyages*, and he discusses at some length who these women may have been.

Ibn Batuta, an uxorious traveller, who took a wife in every port, made an unsuccessful inquiry for these



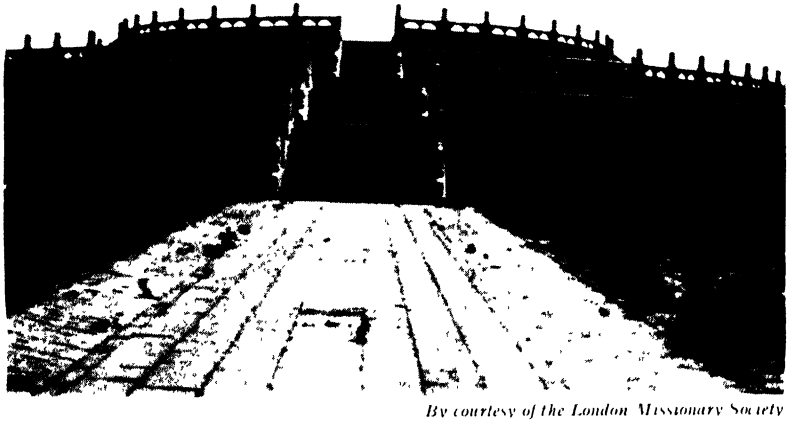
By courtesy of the London Missionary Society

BRONZE DRAGON AT THE SUMMER PALACE, PEKING



By courtesy of O F T

ANGKOR VAT



By courtesy of the London Missionary Society

THE ALTAR OF HEAVEN, PEKING

attractive ladies ; and reports of their charms have continued to excite the imagination of travellers and others, down through the centuries. The story of their existence seems too persistent—surviving as it has for more than a thousand years—to be dismissed as mere legend. But by some curious trick of fate the secret of their identity and their hiding-place has become lost to men, since the days when the dhows of early Arab slavers called at the West Indian ports to barter for these mysterious charmers and carry them away to the harems of the great.

Thafec was a small kingdom on the west coast of India. After the traveller had sailed past the kingdom of the Balharas, he came to Jorz, and then to Thafec. Thafec must therefore have been in the neighbourhood of Goa.

Now as recently as sixty years ago a traveller named Kennedy, on his return from Goa, reported that he had heard there precisely the same story. There existed, not far off to the south-east, a race of women noted for their fairness and beauty. These women were said to be descendants of a Portuguese convent of dissolute nuns, who had established a community of free love, and were ruled by an abbess. Two of his ship's company, says Kennedy, went on a journey into the interior in search of this community ; but returned as unsuccessful as Ibn Batuta.

And so the mystery remains, and perhaps, somewhere in Western India, this race of fair and wanton women remains also. At all events, it seems reasonably certain that they remained there until comparatively recently. But how such a community managed to survive, and how such a secret—evidently fairly widely known at one time—became so completely lost, are mysteries which seem likely to remain unsolved for ever.

The secret of the crocodile-catchers is another curious mystery provided by the teeming peoples of Mother India. There is a certain caste of natives, living along the banks of Indian rivers, who are not afraid of the terrible " mugger," or crocodile, which takes an annual toll of many hundreds of human lives in that country.

Commander Kenworthy (now Lord Strabolgi), writing in the *Wide World Magazine* in 1930, gives a vivid account of how, when a large crocodile he had shot escaped into the river, three of these natives, stripping off all their clothes except their loin-cloths, and with one light bamboo pole between them, waded and swam into deep water, full of other crocodiles, to where the blood rising to the surface marked the position of the wounded " mugger." Poking about with their pole, the men presently located the crocodile, and promptly dived under the water, seized hold of their terrifying prey, and hauled it to the surface. They then dragged it to the bank—kicking, struggling, and snapping—rolled it ashore, and finished it off.

" Nothing in the world," is Lord Strabolgi's comment, " would have induced me to go into that river, for it was swarming with crocodiles, some of them of very large size ; and they were all man-eaters."

Legend has it that this particular caste have a peculiar smell, because of which no crocodile will bite them. Mentioning this, Lord Strabolgi records that in the case which he witnessed, this theory was proved to be wrong, for one of the natives was actually nipped in the foot by the " mugger " during the struggle, and a slight wound was inflicted. The trio, however, took this as a huge joke, and " yelled with laughter."

This caste will eat crocodile flesh, and sometimes catch them in special nets. They are the only people in

the world known to go into a river full of crocodiles and bring one of them, still alive, out on to the bank. It is said that none of these mysteriously gifted people has ever been killed or even seriously wounded by crocodiles. But the real reason for their immunity remains wrapped in mystery, for " muggers " will drag down a swimmer without hesitation. They regularly lie in wait for those who come down to the rivers for water ; and they have even been known to upset boats deliberately and devour their occupants.

The progress of human knowledge is a queer and tortuous course. Three thousand years ago Homer was singing of pygmies who lived in the far south whither the cranes flew. Herodotus told a traveller's tale of them. For ages fables grew about their exploits.

Then, last century, pygmies were actually found in Central Africa, just where the Greeks and the Egyptians had located them. To-day we know that there are also pygmies scattered over the oceanic islands of Asia in great variety. But how they got there, how they became different, we know no more than the fabulists who invented battles of pygmies and cranes. The pygmy remains a mystery which has puzzled ethnologists for a hundred years.

A tribe of pygmies has been registered for some time in New Guinea, for example ; but as recently as the winter of 1935, Lord Moyne discovered in the interior of that island a most mysterious pygmy tribe, entirely new to the books of science.

Although New Guinea has long been under civilised administration, though these Aiome pygmies dwell in the territory mandated to Australia, their existence was only a rumour, brought from the interior by wandering prospectors, and long dismissed as inaccurate.

Who were these little people? Did they really exist; and, if so, where? These were the mysteries which Lord Moyne set out to solve.

After a journey in launches up the River Ramu, a journey which, Lord Moyne tells me, was not without its dangers, both from the treacherous currents of the river and from cannibal tribes on its lower reaches, the expedition reached Atemble, 170 miles from the mouth of the river.

But inquiries among the local natives served only to deepen the mystery of the pygmies of Aiome. That some such tribe was known to the Atemble natives was soon discovered; but the mention of them aroused such terror in the breasts of the people of Atemble that it was practically impossible to obtain any information concerning the unknown tribe from this source.

The explorers, however, received the most earnest warnings of the danger of having anything to do with the *lik lik* (little) men, and of their prowess with bow and arrow and stone axe.

Another difficulty, and one which largely accounted for the exceptional obscurity which the mysterious tribe had managed to maintain, was the fact that their villages, when their whereabouts were at last traced, proved to lie in an uncontrolled area to which all entry by white men is strictly forbidden by the Government.

At length, however, an Atemble native who understood a little pidgin-English, was persuaded, much against his better judgment, to set out with a message to the nearest pygmy village, inviting its members to come and trade with the white men.

Nor was their neighbours' terror of the mystery tribe of New Guinea assumed for the explorers' benefit. When eventually a party of twenty-five Aiomes did

appear in the village, the people of Atemble vanished incontinently into the forest.

Except for the unimaginable filth which covered them, however, there was nothing very terrible about the Aiome pygmies; but their appearance fully confirmed the fact that in them Lord Moyne had unearthed a first-class mystery. They were cheerful; their dirt had not obscured their sense of humour; and they were much more ready to trade than some civilised races nowadays.

Moreover, they were most genuinely pygmy. The men had an average height of some 4 feet 6 inches, which is indeed taller than the pygmies of Central Africa, but considerably shorter than the one pygmy tribe already registered in Dutch New Guinea. They were also of an entirely different type from the river natives. Nearly a foot shorter in average stature, they were of a strongly contrasted colour, being light brown, while their neighbours at Atemble were very dark brown, and the people of the Aiome foothills of a still sootier shade.

While very shy, these mysterious people were at the same time most friendly. Their faces lit up in quick response to a smile, and they seemed much more lively and intelligent than most of the river natives. Faintly tattooed on each of the men were about ten straight lines running perpendicularly on the forehead and diagonally on the temples, and three lines diagonally on each cheek. They had bushy eyebrows and upcurving eyelashes, and some had much hair on their faces, chiefly on the chin. Fine sticks and quills were worn as ornaments through the nose.

Some had daggers of cassowary bone, and others clumsy double-headed axes of stone. The men all

carried bows and arrows, and bore circular shields, about 20 inches in diameter, slung over the shoulder in a net of coloured string. But in spite of their prowess as warriors and hunters, Lord Moyne reports them as skilled cultivators of their "gardens."

Trade was done by means of signs, the Aiomes willingly exchanging specimens of their weapons, implements and ornaments, for such desirable possessions as rolls of copper wire and empty tins. Then, silently and mysteriously as they had come, the pygmies disappeared in the direction of their unknown jungle villages.

For a moment the curtain of obscurity which had hidden these little people, since their earliest beginnings, from the knowledge of the outside world, had been partially drawn aside ; and a tantalising glimpse of the secret life which lay beyond it was revealed. Then the curtain swung back again into place, leaving us but little nearer the full solution of the mystery of the pygmies of Aiome than we were before.

The little men and their bright-eyed wives spoke an unknown language of their own ; the expedition had no means of questioning them about their jungle lives. Because of the Government's restrictions it was impossible for Lord Moyne to follow them to their homes for the evidence of his own eyes. Out of an orchid-starred gloom the Aiomes had come ; back into the same gloom they swiftly went.

For no one knows how many hundred years these little people have dwelt unsuspected in the forest depths. Their discovery last year is one of the greatest romances of modern exploration. But the discovery of the actual whereabouts and physical appearance of the Aiome pygmies has done little more than touch the fringe of the mystery which still surrounds this particular

branch of *lik lik* men, as it surrounds others of their kind.

It is suggested that the Papuan pygmies may have reached the larger islands of the Malay Archipelago in prehistoric times, when there was still dry land between those islands and the mainland of Asia. But at present there is little more than surmise on which to base such an assumption. To which of the great families of mankind the Aiome pygmies belong is uncertain. Their language, religion, civil organisation, and history remain further mysteries for the anthropologist to work upon.

The Aiomes of New Guinea appear to have evolved at least some primitive form of civilisation and culture of their own ; but from the island of Borneo, in the last century, came tidings of a most mysterious people, so primitive as to be little more developed than animals.

In the year 1831 the *Singapore Chronicle* published the following curious notes by a Mr. Dalton, who had lived for many years on the east coast of Borneo.

" Farther towards North Borneo," ran the account, " there are to be found men living absolutely in a state of nature, who neither cultivate the ground nor live in huts, who neither eat rice nor salt, and who do not associate with each other, but rove about the woods like wild beasts.

" The sexes meet in the jungle, or a man carries away a woman from some kampong. When the children are old enough to shift for themselves they usually separate, neither one afterwards thinking of the other. At night they sleep under some large tree, the branches of which hang low. On these they fasten their children in a kind of swing. Round the tree they make a fire to keep off wild beasts and snakes. They cover themselves with a

piece of bark, and this also wraps their children ; it is soft and warm, but does not keep out the rain.

" These poor creatures are looked upon and treated by the Dayaks as wild beasts ; hunting parties of twenty-five or thirty go out and amuse themselves by shooting at the children in the trees with *sumpits*, the same as monkeys, from which they are not easily distinguished.

" The men taken on these expeditions are invariably killed ; the women are commonly spared, if they are young. It is somewhat remarkable that the children of these wild Dayaks cannot be sufficiently tamed to be entrusted with their liberty. Selgie (the Dayak chief of Coti) told me he never recollected an instance when it did not escape into the jungle at the first opportunity ; notwithstanding that many had been treated kindly for years."

The mystery of who these animal-men were, and how it came about that they had continued so long in such a state of arrested development—there is no other known people in the world still living thus absolutely in a state of nature, even a hundred years ago—has never been solved. They can hardly have been orang-outans, as has been said of them—their use of fire and of bark-wrappings proves that, however closely their description otherwise tallies with that of the great man-like ape of Borneo. They must be written off as one more of the many riddles of Asia to which no man has found the answer ; for no known tribe inhabiting Borneo answers to the extraordinary description of these people.

But perhaps the most enigmatic of all the mysterious peoples of the East are the Wild Wa head-hunters of the Shan States, between China and Nepal. Neither Chinese, Indian, nor Tibetan, their origin and place in the Human Family is wrapped in obscurity. They

are the descendants of some aboriginal race older than any of the others.

Nominally Buddhist in religion, the Wild Wa have lived apart for so long, among their inaccessible hills, that their worship is inextricably mixed up with demonology and mysterious head-hunting rites. They worship their dead, trees, rocks, and other natural phenomena, their tree-worship being rendered slightly more respectable by the legend that the Buddha Gautama attained supreme wisdom under the pipul tree.

Apart from the placation of the malignant demons by whom they deem themselves to be surrounded, and from the collection of human heads as trophies of manhood, the main occupation of these Shans is surely one of the oddest in the world ; it is nothing less than the export of dragon bones and of jade. The former romantic-sounding commodity is of prime importance in China and Tibet, where the bones are powdered for use as medicine and as a powerful aphrodisiac and love-potion.

The dragon bones are mined from fossil deposits in the steaming valleys of the Shan country, valleys which were once the home of dinosaurs and other prehistoric monsters. Traders say that every *picul* of this precious powder costs a human life, and it is probable that their estimate is not greatly exaggerated. Constant danger, not only from fever, snakes, and wild animals, but also from the treacherous quicksand, menaces the seeker for the bones of prehistoric " dragons." Many dig in bog and swamp for months without finding a single bone.

A queer and mysterious people, of whom little is known in any detail, are the Wild Wa. There is nothing

which throws any light on the early history of their country.

Previous to Britain's occupation of the Shan states, in consequence of the annexation of Upper Burma, the whole of the states had been involved in almost incessant civil war. And for a century before that, the wars between China and Burma, and Burma and Siam, had led to the endless marching and counter-marching of troops through these hills. The soldiers were Buddhist, no doubt, but they had very little regard for sacred things, and most of what writings there may have been on the history of the country, perished with the monasteries.

The truth about the origin of the Wild Wa and many of their neighbour tribes will now, probably, never be known. And, so intractable is this fierce people, so inaccessible the fever-ridden territory they inhabit, that mystery surrounds their lives almost as closely as it does those of the Aiome pygmies of New Guinea.

CHAPTER VI

TIBET—A LAND APART

IF any country in the world has just claim to the title of "The Land of Mystery," that country is surely Tibet. Shut in behind the formidable barrier of the Himalaya, the "Home of Winter," these vast territories have remained *terra incognita* for centuries; and behind the snow-clad mountain masses and the misty draperies of monsoon clouds lies concealed a world of secret places.

Small wonder that Tibet has captured the imagination of mankind. Its peculiar aloofness, its remote, unruffled calm, and the mystery surrounding its great rivers and mountains make an irresistible appeal to the mind. For generations the cunning lamas, aided by the astute Chinese, who have excellent reasons for discouraging any penetration from outside sources into the invaluable barrier state which guards the western entrance to their empire, have fostered a steadily growing body of forbidding legend, tales of Himalayan demons and dark lamaistic mysteries, for the very purpose of discouraging visitors.

Until only a very few years ago, death by torture was the fate of any foreigner rash enough to penetrate these mountain fastnesses; and the first outside exploration of the country had perforce to be made by native spies, chiefly Indians, who insinuated themselves into the forbidden land in the guise of pilgrims.

Buddhist prayer-wheels concealed the maps made by these first heroic pioneers: every step they took through the frowning passes was counted, and well-fingered rosaries marked off their distances for them; more than one never returned from their perilous survey, and their fate at the hands of the cruel and fanatical lamas is better not thought of.

Even to-day there are large areas of Tibet where the foot of no white man has ever trod: mountains, lakes, rivers, and monasteries which he has never seen. It is, in fact, difficult for Europeans, accustomed to accept as a matter of course the benefits of every advance of science and civilisation, to realise the utter remoteness of Tibet from the modern world. For Tibet is still living virtually in the Middle Ages.

To offer a single striking example, not only is there not a single mile of railway in all that enormous region —seventeen times larger than England and Wales—but to the east and north, at any rate, there is no railway within 500 miles of the Tibetan border. It is only in the south and west that the Indian railways, following the foot of the Himalaya, approach within 150 miles of Tibet, and the loftiest of these ends 8000 feet below the level of the Tibetan plateau.

Through all the ages Tibet has held a paramount position among the regions of the world popularly invested with a veil of mystery because of being inaccessible and unknown. The "Land of the Lamas," so isolated, so lofty, so unresponsive to outside influences, has held herself apart from interference from the modern world to such an extent as to provoke the enterprise of generations of more or less speculative geographers and historians, who, because the true facts were so difficult of access, have startled the world with small instalments

of truth surrounded by wide embroideries of decorative fancy.

One of the earliest, if not quite the first, of these Tibetan romances dates from the days of Herodotus, nearly five hundred years before our era. To one particularly startling "traveller's tale" of Tibet the "Father of History" gives a cautious admission of probability, though by no means definite assent.

It was said that in the extreme north-west of India there existed a race of enormous ants, fierce and powerful, whose peculiar mission in life was the digging out of gold. Traders, mounted on swift camels, occasionally succeeded in seizing some of this gold, which was accumulated in heaps by these excavating ants, and then rode rapidly away, pursued by other ferocious guardians of the golden metal, who tore in pieces any whom they caught.

Amongst all the fantastic mysteries relating to Tibet, none has been more tenacious of life than this one story. It has been repeated in every tale of the East told by compilers and adventurers before the days of Herodotus, and was only doubtfully regarded by him as being pure fiction.

It was not until quite recent years, when the trans-Himalayan explorers of the Indian Survey recorded their experiences, that any light was thrown on this mystery. These surveyors, making their way painfully over the terrific altitudes which intervene between India and western Tibet, reached at length the gold-mining districts which lie beyond the mountains on the great western plains. Here they discovered the Tibetan workman delving for gold after a fashion of his own.

The intense cold and fierce winds of the highlands compelled the miner to grovel on the ground enfolded

in a thick black blanket, while he dug or scratched painfully at the alluvial soil with the first tool available to his hand. This was usually a horn of the Tibetan antelope. To all appearances he was a rough imitation of a huge horned ant, grubbing up the auriferous soil and piling it in heaps for subsequent washing.

Guarded by immensely powerful dogs (whose ferocity even to this day is a byword among travellers in Tibet), the Tibetan gold-miner has pursued his unenviable calling from those very early days until the present time. In all these centuries he has hardly improved his processes, making but slight and shallow impressions in the soil, and probably leaving behind him two-thirds of the gold it contains.

Here, then, according to Sir H. Rawlinson, is the solution to the mystery which has surrounded that particular tale. As a solution it certainly appears perfectly probable, but whether it is the true one we have no means of knowing.

Not by any means all of the unparalleled body of legend and mystery which has surrounded Tibet since the dawn of history is thus to be resolved into the merely commonplace. Many of that country's mysteries remain to this day a challenge and an ever-fascinating source of speculation to the outside world.

Of all the remaining mysteries of Tibet, the secret of the country's hidden stores of gold is probably the most exciting to the modern mind. The phrase, "untold gold," loosely used by ourselves to express almost any quantity of wealth, according to the user's ideas on the subject, may be used perfectly literally in respect of Tibet.

Hidden away behind massive bronze-studded doors in remote monasteries, the very existence of some of

which is unknown to the outside world, lie countless tons of gleaming rock and heaps of glinting yellow dust. That much we know beyond question, but of the total amount of this fabulous treasure, or of the exact whereabouts of its hiding-places, we know nothing. These are the secrets of the lamas, secrets which have remained wrapt in mystery since the yellow metal first assumed a value in the eyes of man.

Statistics are unobtainable, and the present export of gold from Tibet is by routes so devious that for the most part it never gets reported. Nevertheless, we know that one-third of the country's population are gold washers for at least a part of the year, and there is every reason to believe that Tibet is one of the world's richest gold-fields.

Statistics of gold are the most elusive of all figures, and official records of gold mined in the past hundred years give no exact indication of where this world store came from. They show that hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of gold have filtered into circulation without being registered at source.

A large part of this unregistered production is Asiatic. This largest of all continents has been a gold producer longer than any other, for almost all the gold of ancient times came from thence. And the gold-producing rivers of Asia, whether they be in Asia Minor, China, India or Siberia, all have their sources in Tibet. The gold which they bear is Tibetan in origin, water-borne from the rocks of the Himalaya.

At present South Africa holds the record for the world's largest gold nugget. This treasure, which was dubbed the " Welcome Stranger," weighed 2520 ounces. But there is every reason to believe that modern gold-mining operations in Tibet would bring to light many

nuggets surpassing the South African record. For nugget gold practically never comes out of Tibet, except by a smuggling process which must evade one of the most ancient principles of Lamaism.

The Lamas hold that gold is a plant, and the nuggets are its seed or root, the dust or spangles being the flower. It is therefore most strictly laid down that gold-washers must reverently return to the soil every nugget they unwittingly unearth, lest the annual harvest of gold should fail. To evade this duty is both sacrilege and treason, punishable by death.

But not only are the majority of the monastic depositories of Tibet's vast stores of gold unknown to any but their mysterious guardians; its sources, as with its eventful disposal, are equally close secrets.

The best known of the gold-fields of Tibet are those of Gartok, on the edge of which stands the fortified monastery which is the clearing-house for most of the gold of Eastern Tibet. The golden monastery of Gartok is situated in a fertile valley, surrounded by steep and forbidding mountains. During the past eight centuries many hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of gold-dust have passed through this building, whose five towering pinnacles are covered with a plating of solid yellow gold. How much of the precious metal lies hidden in its secret vaults at this moment is exciting to speculate.

Stories of mystery surround these treasure-houses of Tibet more thickly than about any other aspect of the country. Concerning the central monastery of Gartok, it is said that its treasury is ghost-guarded. For three hundred years bandits have made repeated attempts to raid its underground store-houses. The first, a bandit prince from Afghanistan, disguised himself and his

sixty men as pilgrims and won his way into the section of the courtyard reserved for the accommodation of strangers.

In the night the impostors strangled to death the sentinels at the doors, forced their way into the vaults, and packed up as many bags of gold as sixty men could carry. The leader, staying below to see his last man safely away, was suddenly felled from behind by a monk who had crept up unnoticed, and who used a bag of gold-dust so effectively as to break the Afghan's skull with a single blow of it.

Since that day more than one covetous individual has succeeded in penetrating as far as the gold-lined vaults of the monastery, but not one has returned alive. The ghost of the Afghan, it is said, has remained ever since to guard the wealth he gave his life to gain. Every intruder he fells with bags of gold, which he topples silently from the roof of the cave-like rooms.

An even more mysterious story is of the northern monasteries, where gold is so abundant that all the dead incarnations of their abbots are preserved in a solid plating of it.

In one of these monasteries a whole gallery of its departed abbots is preserved, each one sitting in golden splendour, cross-legged on a pedestal of gold. Fifteen stone niches, in this gallery, contain the mortal remains of fifteen abbots, all believed by Tibetans to be incarnations of the same man. It happened that thirteen years after the thirteenth abbot had died and been placed in his niche trouble arose, for people said that the corpse which had thus been gold-plated was not really that of the abbot.

So great was the protest that an ecclesiastical synod was held, and after days of deliberation it was announced

that a public test would be made. A monk would stick a dagger through the plating into the corpse, when, if it were genuinely that of a saint, blood would certainly flow from it. If no blood appeared then it would be admitted that a mistake had been made and the corpse would be removed from its niche.

The appointed day arrived, the dagger was thrust violently into the side of the gilded corpse, and lo ! to the great amazement of the sceptics, and amid exclamations of wonderment from the crowd, a crimson stream spurted forth. This miraculous blood was reverently caught in a libation cup made from a human skull (a common form for sacred vessels to take in Tibet) and placed upon the main altar of the temple. There its dried-up contents have remained to the present time, drawing hundreds of pilgrims yearly, to the great glory of the monastery and its thirteenth incarnation.

Although we live in an age that has undoubtedly produced more " miracles " than any in the history of mankind—an age in which man speaks to man the width of the world away, across continents and oceans ; in which the law of gravity is daily set at naught ; in which objects may be seen within the living body of a man merely by turning a light upon him—it is now the fashion to be sceptical about such miracles as the issue of blood from a corpse. Nevertheless, there are quite certainly powers in use in Tibet of which little or nothing is known in the West.

For example, the evidence in support of the use of telepathy as a means of communication among the eternal Himalayan snows is overwhelming. To quote a single instance out of many : members of the Dyhrenfurth Himalayan expedition, on their return, related how a messenger was sent on a twelve days' journey to

the expedition's headquarters to report the death of a bearer. When the man reached Darjeeling he found that the local natives had already informed the headquarters of the bearer's death on the same evening on which it had happened.

Dr. Dyherenfurth was perfectly satisfied that neither signal fires, drums, nor any system of heliography were used in this instance.

Temporary suspension of life is another of the mystifying powers which undoubtedly exist in Tibet, as in certain parts of India. In one authenticated case, a lama gave orders that he should be completely buried for a period of six weeks. Before his voluntary burial the holy man threw himself into an autohypnotic trance; and when at the expiration of the stipulated time his disciples rescued him from the grave he returned to life none the worse for his premature burial. One of his hands, however, had been partly eaten away by ants during his long interment.

But perhaps the most confounding of all the inexplicable "miracles" of this ancient home of mystery is the ability of certain philosophers to create physical heat by the power of mental concentration. These mystics not only spend the night in the snow, clad only in a shirt, but by the heat given out by their bodies can dry wet cloths placed over them in the intense cold of the Himalayan winter. One who can dry six such cloths in a single night becomes a "pupil." It is said that a master of this amazing art can dry as many as twenty.

These are no "traveller's tales"; they are facts recorded by scientific investigators of unquestionable authority. Such phenomenal mental powers as the foregoing, however, seem likely to remain among the

many unsolved mysteries guarded by the mighty Himalaya.

The East has always been renowned for its mystics and ascetics, but no Asiatic country can vie with Tibet in the extraordinary mystery which surrounds her holy men.

" So many things are rumoured of these *gomchens*, their life is so mysterious, their appearance and the rare words they utter are so exceedingly strange that, for Tibetans already inclined to superstitious terror, they seem a thousand times more to be feared than gods and demons," writes Mme David-Neel of the hermits of Tibet ; and adds that lost travellers or hunters have more than once related that, while wandering across solitary hills, they have had a glimpse of non-human beings attending on some of these holy men.

Whatever may be the truth about such psychic phenomena—and to those who learn something of the real Tibet, the word " impossible " soon loses much of its significance—there is no doubt whatever that some of these *gomchens* do possess the most mysterious supernormal powers.

Under the collective term of *lung-gom*, Tibetans include a large number of practices which combine mental concentration with various breathing gymnastics, and which aim at different results, either mental or physical. The effects of *lung-gom* training are said to vary considerably, but the term is especially used for a kind of training which results in the development of almost incredible fleetness of foot.

We read in Milarespa's biography that at the house of the lama who taught him Black Magic there lived a *trapa* who was fleeter than a horse. Milarespa himself boasts of similar powers, and says that he once crossed

in a few days a distance which, before his training, had taken him more than a month to cover.

Unquestionably, the most extraordinary journeys are performed in Tibet through the means of *lung-gom*, journeys which, by western standards, would be utterly impossible of performance by any human being. The pace of *lung-gom* is not a run ; it consists of a regular series of enormous leaps, as if the adept had been endowed with the elasticity of a rubber ball, and rebounded every time his feet touched the ground. Such journeys, which are performed in a trance-like condition, may continue for several days without pause for rest ; and it is said that if a *lung-gom-pa* were suddenly awakened from his trance the shock would undoubtedly kill him.

Adepts in this mysterious art are extremely rare, but they have actually been seen by Europeans, bounding like human kangaroos across the mountains. Mme David-Neel, who probably knows more about the secrets of Tibet than any living person not a Tibetan, describes a *lung-gom-pa* she glimpsed in the forests of the Szetchuanese Far West. This man was naked except for a number of iron chains wound round his body. These chains, it was explained, were necessary to keep the hermit from floating away, for, by the practice of *lung-gom*, his body had become lighter than air.

The facts of this mysterious power of high-speed travel, in a country whose difficulties reduce the pace of the most hardened mountaineers to a laboured plodding, are known, but the means whereby these powers are obtained are wrapped in the closest secrecy. It is known, however, that to become an adept it is necessary to undergo a rigorous training, constituting in part of breathing exercises practised during a strict seclusion in

complete darkness, which lasts three years and three months.

Among these exercises is one in which the student sits cross-legged on a large and thick cushion. He inhales slowly and for a long time, just as if he wanted to fill his body with air. Then, holding his breath, he jumps upwards with legs still crossed, without using his hands, and falls back on his cushion, still remaining in the same position. This exercise is repeated a number of times during each period of practice. Some lamas succeed in jumping to an extraordinary height in this manner, the aim of the exercise, of course, being levitation.

In a curious test of proficiency in this jumping feat a pit is dug in the ground, its depth equal to the height of the candidate. Over the pit is built a kind of cupola, so that between the man seated cross-legged at the bottom of the pit and the opening the distance is twice the height of his body.

The test consists in jumping cross-legged, as in the training exercises, and coming out through the small opening in the top of the cupola.

Such powers, it appears, are the possession of many in Tibet, but that extraordinary country boasts four individuals whose attributes are unique, not only in their own land but in all the world. These are the Grand Lamas of Tibet—the Dalai Lama, supreme temporal ruler ; the Panchan, spiritual head of lamaism in his Vatican at Tashilhunpo ; the Tashi, driven by internal politics into exile in China in 1925 ; and the Mongolian Grand Lama, or Hutuketu, sitting far removed from the ordinary life of Tibetans in the distant and almost mythical city of Urga.

These four are all believed in Tibet to be the " incar-

nations" of an endless line of predecessors, to be exempt from the ordinary necessities of human nature, and to be possessed of extraordinary mystical powers.

Set high upon an isolated hill above holy Lhasa, raising its stupendous walls to a height of nine storeys above the summit, crowned with gilded cupolas glinting in the sun, buttressed on the rough crags over which the long lines of countless banner-decked staircases climb upward from the plains, stands the palace of the man who remains throughout all the changes which have overtaken Tibet during the past twenty years, the most essentially mystical personality in the world.

Miracles invariably attend the birth of a Dalai Lama of Lhasa. The yellow throne in the Potala is, at the time of writing these words, untenanted ; but the late Dalai was discovered by a monk whose saintliness was revealed by the Nachung Chos Gyong Oracle, the national oracle of Tibet, who, on the second day of the first month of every year, prophesies the events of the year to come.

Much superstitious reverence surrounds this famous oracle ; no one is allowed to look on him as he approaches Lhasa ; and the atmosphere of mystery in which he is surrounded is strictly maintained by the authority of the State, which surrounds him with a staff of seventy lamas and burns incense before him.

The State Oracle instructed the monk of his choice to seek for the reincarnation near Khong-po, a little to the east of Lhasa. A vision and a voice directed this emissary to the lake of Chos-khor, in the crystal mirror of whose waters he saw the future Dalai Lama seated as an infant on his mother's lap. It is said that the lake actually stood on end in order to hold up the sacred image of the reincarnation to the monk's favoured eyes.

On the way back to Khong-po the monk encountered " in the house of a respectable and wealthy family " the realisation of his vision ; and the infant whom he recognised as having been revealed to him in the lake was taken to Lhasa and installed as the " Lord of Speech, the Mighty Ocean of Wisdom."

This last Dalai Lama, before he died, gave certain particulars concerning his successor, for the guidance of those whose duty it would be to discover and instate his reincarnation. The new ruler is to be no ordinary child. He must have been born when a magic rainbow was seen in a cloudless sky. On his legs must be stripes like those on a tiger's skin, and on one hand must be an imprint like that of a shell. And finally, there must be near his shoulder-blades two pieces of flesh like rudimentary hands.

But quite apart from whether or no the Grand Lamas of Tibet are reincarnations, apart from alleged miraculous powers, signs and portents, there is undoubtedly some strange fascination about the presence of these individuals, and particularly that of the Dalai. All who have experienced it speak of it with deep reverence. Something of the spirit of mysterious awe which drew the Wise Men of the East to the foot of the cradle at Bethlehem inspires the modern devotees who toil painfully up the steps and ladders of the Potala to an audience with the Presence above.

The first Englishman to obtain an interview with the Dalai—one Thomas Manning, who visited the Forbidden City in 1811—describes his impressions of the Grand Lama of that day in the following glowing terms :

" The lama's beautiful face and manner engrossed almost all my attention. He was at that time about

seven years old ; had the simple and unaffected manners of a well-educated, princely child. His face was, I thought, poetically and affectingly beautiful. He was of a gay and cheerful disposition, his beautiful mouth perpetually unbending into a graceful smile, which illuminated his whole countenance. Sometimes, particularly when he looked at me, his smile almost approached to a gentle laugh. No doubt my grim beard and spectacles somewhat excited his risibility, though I have afterwards, at the New Year's festival, seen him smile and unbend freely, while sitting myself unobserved in a corner, and the notice he took of the strange variety of surrounding objects."

Manning goes so far as to add : " I was extremely affected by this interview with the lama. I could have wept through the strangeness of sensation. I was absorbed in reflections when I got home."

There must certainly be something very exceptional about a boy of seven who could effect the very English Manning, with his " grim beard and spectacles," to such a degree as this.

Of the Panchan Lama, supreme spiritual ruler of Tibet, Mr. Gordon B. Enders, the only foreigner to hold the lama's " Passport to Heaven," says :

" The most unusual characteristic of the Panchan Lama, and one which almost always come to light when he is in conference on serious matters, is his talent for dramatic surprise. When everyone else has finished and the opinion in general that the day's business has been satisfactorily concluded, His Serenity suddenly poses the subject in a new light, showing that the conclusions which have been reached lead inevitably to fresh and often startling new developments. . . . Whence had it come to the Panchan, son of an obscure wood-

chopper, whose education had consisted solely in memorising scripture texts ? "

What are the full facts about these mysterious personalities ? To what do they owe their undoubted and extraordinary powers ? These are mysteries which, as far as the Occident is concerned, seem likely to remain unsolved for many a long day yet ; quite probably, even, for ever.

With reference to the Grand Lamas, there is one little mystery connected with them which is, I think, sufficiently interesting for mention, even though there is nothing in the least mystical or awe-inspiring about it. The palaces of the Grand Lamas of Tibet contain the rarest breed of dog in the world, the tiny " lion dog."

These dogs have an important religious significance in Lamaism, and are always kept in personal attendance on the great incarnations, possession of one of them being permitted to no one else. As the living symbols of a legend, they recall the occasion when Buddha was befriended by lions when lost in a forest. Tibetan monks, who, of course, could never have seen a lion, tried by breeding and cross-breeding several types of small dog to create an animal which would look like a miniature of their conception of the King of Beasts.

After a hundred years of secret experiment the diminutive Fu-kao (Buddha dog), somewhat resembling the Pekinese, was produced, and reserved for the Grand Lamas as one of the badges of their holy office. Every Fu-kao has a white spot on his forehead, representing the pearl of wisdom in the forehead of Buddha, and a white " saddle " over the loins, symbolical of the seat on which the Gautama sat when his lions bore him from place to place. The secret of this unique breed

is not the least jealously guarded of the lamas' many mysteries.

In addition to being a land of hidden gold, a country of secret monasteries, mysterious mountains, and haunted valleys, where magic plays a daily part in the lives of the majority of the inhabitants, Tibet is a land of rushing waters ; and about her streams and rivers hangs much of the universal mysteriousness of the country.

Water has always been connected with elementals in every land, and to the Tibetans, demon-beset throughout the whole of their lives, most of their country's rivers are spirit-haunted, their sources guarded by unimaginable demons. Even to the sceptical and material minds of the West the great rivers of Tibet remain a challenge and a mystery, so little is known about them.

Of the most mysterious rivers of Tibet, the Yangtze (Kin-sha) is the largest and the Mekong is the smallest, the Salween, though considerably smaller than the Yangtze, being bigger than the Mekong. Everyone knows where these three great Asiatic rivers pour out their burdens, but where these mighty waters have their distant birth is not the least of the mysteries which surround the Yangtze, the Mekong, and the Salween.

All three rivers rise far up on the great frozen plateau of north-central Tibet, known as the Chang Tang, and somewhere in that particular mountain range, averaging 17,000 feet above sea-level, known as the Tang-la. The headwaters of the Yangtze, here called the Mur Ussu, rise from the northern slopes of this range, the headwaters of the Salween (called the Nag Chu) from its southern slopes. Between them, but further east, rise the headwaters of the Mekong.

That at one point these three great rivers should flow within 50 miles of each other, the Mekong in the centre being only 28 miles from the Yangtze and 20 from the Salween, is one of the geographical wonders of the world.

Probably no man, and certainly no white man, has ever seen the actual source of any of these rivers, on which so much of the prosperity of both China and the Malay Peninsula depends. We know the whereabouts of their sources, but, as far as we can tell, no man has ever set eyes on the mysteries of their birth; and whether they spring from glacier, living rock, or—as the Tibetans contend—from the mouths of enormous dragons—we have no means of knowing.

The headwaters of the Yangtze, the "River of Golden Sand," have been to some extent explored by Prejevalsky, Wellby, Rockhill, Sven Hedin, and others. They are believed to rise among the glaciers of the Tang-la, but their ultimate source still remains unknown.

Even the length of the Yangtze is a riddle to which none can be sure of the answer. The river was formerly considered to be about 3000 miles in length, but the discovery of the great bend at Li-liang, and recently of another bend, north of Ba-t'ang, by Oliver Coales, have added hundreds of miles to its estimated length. It is safe to say that the river is not less than 3500 miles long, but it may be nearer 4000 long or even more.

North of Ba-t'ang the main river is little known, its affluents less, and hundreds of miles of the upper Yangtze must be written off as unexplored. The course it takes, the nature of the country through which it flows, and the people (if any) who dwell among its gorges, all are unknown. Lower down, too, in the neighbourhood of Sui-fu, about 1500 miles from the mouth,

the river plunges mysteriously into the bottom of a terrific gorge, in country whose difficulties have kept it unexplored to this day, and for many miles at this point the nature of the Yangtze remains a mystery.

The Mekong is the central one of these three rivers; mystery surrounds it as closely as it does the mighty Yangtze. Its ultimate source has never been discovered, though the name of the ill-fated French explorer Dutreuil de Rhins, who was murdered in Tibet, will always be associated with the headwaters of this river which he discovered and mapped.

Here, too, are many blanks in our knowledge yet to be filled in. Between 29 and 31 degrees N. Latitude, for example, the appearance of the Mekong is practically unknown, and its nature remains a most tantalising mystery to this day.

So, also, with its length, which can be stated with no greater accuracy than that of the Yangtze, so incomplete is our knowledge of this enigmatic river. In the light of what we know of it at present, the mysterious Mekong is believed to be somewhere between 2000 and 2500 miles in length, but subsequent explorations may well prove even this non-committal estimate to be hopelessly inaccurate.

But of this trio of Tibetan rivers the Salween is the least known. Its source and considerably more than 300 miles of its headwaters are entirely unknown. Whence springs this flood, which travels more than 2000 miles before it finds the sea, and what mysteries lie concealed among the first 300 miles of its course none can say.

Lower still, in its straight north to south course through Yun-nan, the Salween flows in a deep and difficult trough, filled with the green gloom of almost impassable

jungles, and rendered harder to explore by its murderous climate. A sinister country this, of which the most fantastic stories seem almost credible. About 100 miles of the river here are entirely unexplored; and in spite of the efforts of modern explorers the Salween remains for the most part a mystery and a challenge to the minds of men.

Together with the mighty Yangtze, probably the most important river to find birth amid the eternal snows of Tibet, is the Tsangpo, which, as the Brahmaputra, eventually finds its way through Bengal into the Bay. For more than half a century the "Falls of Brahmaputra" remained one of the most baffling secrets of the mystery rivers of Tibet.

The existence of a mighty waterfall, hitherto unknown, on the Tsangpo was first reported by the famous lama Kinthup, who tried to trace the course of this little-known river's headwaters, but found himself unable to penetrate further than Pemakochung. According to this pioneer, the Tsangpo fell over a 150-feet cliff, about 2 miles from the monastery of Pemakochung, forming at its foot a big lake where rainbows are always seen.

Subsequent explorers, however, entirely failed to find any trace of this mysterious fall, though two of them, Bailey and Morshead, succeeded in following the river another 10 miles.

Beyond the furthest point reached by the latter explorers remained a gap of some 50 miles, about which absolutely nothing was known. In fact for half that distance there was said to be no track of any sort near the river, which was hemmed in by bare rock walls several thousand feet high. Was it possible that hidden away in the depths of this gloomy gorge there really

was a great waterfall? This question remained a constant challenge to the world's explorers, one of the most romantic geographical mysteries of unknown Tibet.

Everything, even tradition itself, pointed to the existence of the falls. The Tsangpo near Lhasa flows at an altitude of 12,000 feet above sea-level. Its lower reaches, known as the Dihang, issue from the Abor Hills at an altitude of some 1000 feet. One hundred and fifty miles east of Lhasa the Tsangpo, still a calm, big river, disappears into the mountains, and after following a course which could only be guessed, reappears in Assam.

It has bored its way through the mightiest mountain range in the world, and in doing so has descended the enormous height of 11,000 feet. What more natural than to suppose that somewhere in the depths of that unknown gorge through which it passes in its early stages there was hidden a mighty waterfall?

Moreover, there has always been a legend current among the Tibetans, and said to be recorded in certain sacred books kept in the monastery at Pemakochung, that at one point on the River Tsangpo there are no less than seventy-five falls, each presided over by a spirit—whether benevolent or malicious is not stated.

Even after Bailey and Morshead had shown that Kinthup was wrong the question was not finally settled, for there still remained that 50 miles of gorge unexplored. It is true there had always been sceptics—hard-headed matter-of-fact geographers who, arguing from analogy, pointed out that since no other river which rises behind the Himalaya boasted a waterfall it was therefore unlikely that the Tsangpo would prove an exception.

But waterfalls depend as much upon geological structure as upon geography argued those who believed in the existence of the mysterious falls. If there should happen to be a band of soft rock crossing the lower part of the unknown gorge the formation of a waterfall would be by no means impossible.

Then, in 1923, Captain F. Kingdon Ward, the well-known botanist and explorer, accompanied by Lord Cawdor, set out from England in an attempt finally to solve the mystery of that unexplored gorge, and to prove or disprove, once for all, the existence of the fabled "Brahmaputra Falls."

After four weeks of arduous travel through the mysterious gorge, during which the expedition had penetrated a considerable distance into its unexplored section, it was found that the river had rapidly dropped 1851 feet. From this fact the likelihood of their coming upon a mighty cataract increased with every mile the explorers travelled. The solution of what had been a geographical mystery for half a century was within their grasp.

"Our excitement may be imagined," writes Kingdon Ward.

The reports that for a considerable distance at this point there was no track of any kind beside the river were perfectly correct. Sheer walls of beetling rock hemmed in the hurrying Brahmaputra on either side. At last, however, the party managed to get down to the "beach" of tumbled boulders, at a point where the bed of the river suddenly began to fall very steeply.

Here the boulder-loaded water had blown a hole 15 feet wide clean through the middle of a high wall of rock jutting diagonally across from the opposite cliff and hurling itself through the breach, rushed headlong

into a gorge so deep and narrow that one could scarcely see any sky overhead ; then it disappeared from sight.

The only way of obtaining a view of what lay within the gloomy depths of that gorge was to look down into it from above. Accordingly, the explorers, felling a small tree to use as an improvised ladder, struggled up 100 feet to the top of the cliff, hauling themselves up through the bushes. From the vantage point thus gained it was possible to see some distance down the gorge, and this is what the explorers saw.

Below the maelstrom created by the first cascade the river flowed smooth and unbroken for about 100 yards ; it was more than 30 yards wide at this point, and appeared enormously deep. Rapidly gathering speed, it suddenly poured over another ledge, falling in a sleek, green wave for about 40 feet. Then, scarcely had the river regained its tranquillity and green colour than it boiled over once more and was lost to view round the corner.

The mystery had been solved at last. The legendary falls of the Brahmaputra stood revealed.

CHAPTER VII

THE FORBIDDEN CITY OF PEKING

OF all the mystery cities of the East none has been so wrapped about with the coloured banners of romance as China's mysterious capital; none has kept its ancient secrets longer. What poetic suggestion in the very name of Peking—a Forbidden City reserved for a Son of Heaven!

For a thousand years this has been the site of Emperors' dwellings. Peking has become a city mysterious, not only in that entry to it was strictly forbidden to all but a privileged few, but that it has represented the profound reverence paid to the sovereign by the people of one of the greatest empires the world has ever seen, the immense spiritual power in his hands, the tradition of his divine descent, and the immemorial dignity of his office.

The rumoured splendours of old Peking have rung through the civilised world from the days of Marco Polo and beyond; the infinite and elaborate care with which its secrets were guarded for generation after generation gradually resulted in the building up about the Forbidden City of a legend of glamour and mystery unequalled in the history of the world. Until less than fifty years ago the name of Peking remained the very sign and symbol of Oriental mystery, the unguessed and unguessable secret of China.

The Liaos (A.D. 915–1125) had at least one building

on the site of the present-day Peking. The Chins began a series of artificial lakes in the twelfth century, bringing water for them from the Jade Fountain. Later the Mongols laid out gardens in the Pei Hai ; and a legend of the mighty Kublai Khan tells how he ordered his henchmen to bring a certain blue flower from the plains of Mongolia to plant in them, as a reminder to his children of the steppes, the birthplace of their ancestors. Thus far back into the shadows of antiquity does the history of the Forbidden City go.

But it was with the advent of the Mings that the mysterious city reached the height of its glory, at the same time assuming such an aspect of exalted remoteness as has been attained by no other city in the world. The gates of Holy Meccah are at least thrown open to the Faithful once every year ; any Tibetan has always had access to the Forbidden City of Lhasa ; but the innermost city of Peking, not even the Pekingese themselves might enter.

The Manchus wisely made no attempt to alter what they could not improve, and also continued the policy of keeping the Imperial premises rigidly closed, well knowing that the secret of romantic power lies in aloofness. Walls within walls surrounded them, red outer walls, the graceful turrets at their corners reflected in the waters of the moat below ; inner walls dividing the sacred enclosure into the true Forbidden City which contains the Winter Palaces, and the domain where lie the Sea Palaces and pleasure-gardens ; and yet other walls separating courtyard from courtyard and building from building.

What lay behind those walls, the unimaginable splendours, the infinitely sacred mysteries, were speculations which intrigued the world for centuries. Not

only was all knowledge of these things denied to all "outer barbarians" not sufficiently fortunate to be born Chinese; they were equally hidden from the Chinese themselves.

So closely were the secrets of the Forbidden City guarded that for many generations no one was allowed to mount any point along Peking's 14 miles of encircling wall, lest he overlook the palaces—an unthinkable irreverence. For the same reason the police forbade the construction of high buildings. It was not until 1860 that Prince Kung, anxious to propitiate foreigners, gave the order permitting them to walk on the walls.

For hundreds of years, from behind the crimson defence of the Sons of Heaven there issued no word, save periodical decrees from the Dragon Throne, each ending with the traditional formula: "Tremble and obey!" China trembled—and obeyed, scarce daring to cast so much as a curious glance at the sacred walls which enclosed its destiny, the destiny of earth's most envied and puissant empire.

Thus Peking, like Lhasa, remained for centuries a city of mystery, of closed gates and barring walls. Unlike those of Lhasa, however, the secrets of China's capital did not prove disappointing when, with the establishment of the Republic, they were eventually revealed. Rather the wonder and awe of the palaces and temples, so long jealously hidden from the eyes of the profane, surpassed all expectation. Their grandeur produced a thrill beyond anticipation.

Seen from a little distance, with its walls and gate towers sharply defined against a background of hills, Peking still appears what it was when it first became the capital of China in the Middle Ages, a Tartar encampment in stone, "a fortified garrison of nomad bannermen

surrounding the palace of the Great Khan." Its temples, palaces and tombs remain as a living reminder of changing religions and the rise and fall of dynasties.

The city is a composite monument to Tartar, Mongol Manchu and Chinese conquests, of Western invasion and punishments, of Persian, Indian and Jesuit influences.

Peking is a city of gorgeous ghosts; many of its ancient secrets are unimaginable to the Western mind. Looking at it, one is reminded of such soldiers of fortune as Chu Yuan-chang, "the Chinese Haroun Al Raschid," of Kublai Khan, "the Great Khan," who first made Peking the capital of the Chinese Empire, of Yung Loh, the great builder, of Tz'u Hsi, the woman ruler, strong as the strongest man, who twice fled from the city before the allied armies of the West, and of many more—figures of splendour and renown, many of them, and others of unparalleled cruelty, treachery, and degradation.

Peking to-day is really four cities, one within another. The outermost and most modern of these is the Chinese City, a curious combination of town and suburb, in which the busiest commercial streets of Peking are separated by a bare half-mile or so from fields, vegetable gardens, or groups of farm-houses with all the peace of a country village.

The north wall of the Chinese City serves also as the south wall of the inner Tartar or Manchu City, the "City of Nine Gates." When the conquering Manchus took Peking they relegated the people they had defeated to this Outer City surrounding the Imperial City, and here they were permitted to live and trade. The Tartar City was also reserved as a garrison for the troops charged with the defence of the capital—the Imperial Guard, or Banner organisations.

Enclosed in the Tartar City, the third of these "Chinese Boxes," the Imperial City was formerly the fashionable residential quarter for Manchu and Chinese officials who were frequently on duty at the Court. It covers an area of nearly two square miles, and is also enclosed by walls.

In the very centre of all this lies the Forbidden City, the innermost heart of them, its two lines of massive pink-washed walls soaked in both history and mystery; its yellow-tiled palaces and the blue dome of the Temple of Heaven dominating the four cities of Peking in an unchanging and still mysterious symbol of the colourful past.

A great part of the impressiveness of the Forbidden City lies in its majestic proportions. Nothing here is petty; nothing small or insignificant. It is a city of magnificent vistas, spreading over such a vast area that for many years it was believed to be the largest city in the world.

The vandal hand of time has at long last thrown open the heavy bronze-studded doors of this secret city; but though much of it is now open to the general public, these spacious courts, these lovely palaces and temples retain much of their mystery yet. We may walk through their echoing emptiness, trying to reconstruct in our minds the varied and glittering scenes which filled them in times past, but for the most part we are met by an enigmatic blankness which leaves us baffled now as did the barred gates of former days. The gates of the city may have fallen but its secrets are not so easily to be yielded up.

The visitor who expects to find in the city of old Peking something like the palace of a European monarch will be disappointed. Chinese palaces, like all their fine

houses and temples, consist, not of one vast building but of a series of verandahed halls constructed on high stone foundations.

The Forbidden City is actually what its name implies —a miniature city within a city, with streets of state apartments, dwelling-houses, women's quarters, store-houses, theatres, libraries, temples, and dependencies— the whole complicated machinery of living required by a sovereign and his court shut in by unalterable convention from all contacts with the outer world.

The Ch'eng Kuang Tien or Circular Throne Room of Kublai Khan, for example, must have been one of the most magnificent of all the secrets of the Sacred City. To-day, unfortunately, the Throne Hall is shorn of most of its splendour, but enough remains to enable us to reconstruct in some detail the glories described so wonderingly by Marco Polo and Friar Odoric.

Within the outer ramparts, whitewashed in Mongol days, were several buildings with glazed tile roofs and dragon-entwined columns. The walls of the main room were covered with yellow cat-skins, the floors with black sable, and in the ante-chambers were curtains of white sable and ermine, interspersed with hangings of rich red leather. Kublai Khan's own apartments, where he died in 1294, were entirely of tzu-t'an, a precious hardwood, " carved to the fineness of cobwebs."

Decorated with many different-coloured marbles, and glittering with jewels, the Throne Hall was more splendid still, while the throne itself was draped with cloth of gold and inlaid with precious stones.

A clepsydra of gold and pearls marked the time, a miniature figure appearing before the dial to announce the hour of the great feasts.

The entry of the Great Khan was heralded by a blare

of silver trumpets. A silken handkerchief was bound over the mouth and nostrils of every man who served him, "so that no breath or odour from their persons shall taint the dish or goblet presented to the lord." Whenever he raised his cup to drink there was a burst of music, and the assembled company bowed low before the Emperor as he quaffed his wine.

In those days men knew how to drink, and the huge, pearl-tasselled jade vessel, standing "two paces in height and exceeding the value of four great towns," was emptied from golden goblets by the feasting, laughing, bejewelled crowd, as fast as pipes could bring the wine flowing into it.

The feast ended, the mechanical peacocks would be sent for, and the Tartars, to amuse their lord, would go one after the other and clap their hands; upon which the peacocks would flap their wings and make as if to dance, which amusing conceit was brought about "either by diabolic art or by some engine underground," says Friar Odoric.

At length the noble host and his guests would adjourn to meditate on pleasant things in the pleasure gardens, some to wander through the wooded park, caressing the tame deer and squirrels, others to gather in the pavilions at the edge of the lakes where, "midst such multitudes of wild geese, and swans and ducks that it is something to wonder at," dragon-flies haunted the reed-beds with a soundless flicker of green and gold.

A blue-tiled sanctuary which to-day summons to the mind a very different picture is the Ta Kao Hsuan Tien, Temple of the Most High. Originally this was a place where the girls chosen to serve at Court were taught etiquette "and the various arts respectable for their sex," presenting, every seventh day of the seventh moon,



MECCA. THE MOSQUE WITH KAABA AND PULPIT AT TIME OF PRAYER



THE LAST 2000 FEET ON EVEREST
(from 27,000 feet)

the results of their skill for the inspection of the Emperor. Later the main hall was transformed into a temple to Yu Huang, the Jade Emperor, and the emperors came here to pray for rain in times of drought.

The contents of this place of such varied associations remain a mystery to this day, for the keys are in the charge of the Manchu household, and it is only opened a few times a year for the princes delegated to burn incense —never for casual visitors.

Another mystery of old Peking which has never yet been solved is the true nature of the famous " Coal Hill," an artificial mound towering behind the Imperial precincts, with pretty pavilions crowning its five peaks. Some say this was an earthwork raised to ward off the evil influences of the North ; others declare it to have been planned merely as an Imperial pleasaunce. But the most general theory of its origin, and the one from which it gets its name, is that this high hill is constructed of solid coal, so as to provide endless fuel for an endless siege.

For the Imperial City, devised by the Mongol conqueror who had only been content to exchange the safety of his movable tents for this splendid camp of stone and brick, is planned on severely practical military lines. It remains a citadel—the last hope of a dynasty. Its key-note is not fairy-like grace but power—entrenched power.

In addition to the almost inexhaustible supply of fuel believed to be provided by the Coal Hill, there are under the walls of the inner citadel vast low-lying granaries, which were always kept fully stocked with grain. Artificial lakes within the Forbidden City provided ample water to keep the great moats filled, even if the outer supplies and the feeding canals should

be cut off. Thus the three siege necessities—water, food, and fuel—were always assured ; and with these and the massive walls the Sons of Heaven were accounted safe.

Whatever the real truth about the substance of the Coal Hill, we know that by the time of the Mings it had become nothing more utilitarian than a pleasure-garden, much what the Petit Trianon was in the mad, extravagant days of Marie Antoinette.

In those days there must often have been a whispering of silks, a swooning weight of perfumes in the summer-houses which still grace the Coal Hill, or the tinkle of soft laughter as the painted damsels peeped through latticed windows or a screen of leaves down on the road-way below the wall, the Street of Everyday Life which skirted the Imperial pleasure hill. It is easy to imagine with what proud indifference and yet what childish curiosity these pampered favourites of fortune watched the starving beggars crying for coppers to passers-by, and the blue-hooded Peking carts toiling slowly through the dust.

Courtiers, careless of duty, idled their time away on this pleasure hill under the blossoming trees. Eunuchs reclining upon rich carpets, with silken cushions to support their elbows, amused themselves here by painting, or, summoning their attendants with tablets of writing-ink and brushes, inscribed upon some flat stone conveniently near, verses in praise of some famous Court beauty.

If the Forbidden City was the shrine of Imperial mysteries, of the Sacred Dragon of China, it was also and equally the shrine of sacred mysteries ; a city not only of splendid palaces but of even more splendid temples. One man, and only one—the Emperor, the Son of Heaven—was thought fit to ascend the marble altar of

the Temple of Heaven, the most mysteriously holy spot in all China, the middle stone of which is regarded by the Chinese as being the central point of the entire universe.

No foreigner has ever beheld the Emperor officiating as High Priest. The ultimate mysteries of the Great Sacrifice to the Supreme Deity were among the most closely guarded in the world.

The Emperor's biennial visits to the Temple of Heaven were duly announced in the official *Peking Gazette*, and special notice was sent to each legation warning foreigners not to approach or attempt to look upon the Imperial procession. All Chinese were ordered to remain indoors and put up shutters along the line of the route, while the side-streets were closed off by blue cloth curtains.

The city seemed to hold its breath, awed by the deep solemnity of the occasion. In absolute silence the Son of Heaven made the journey and the mysterious sacrifice. Lest even the whistle of a distant train should break the impressive stillness and thus profane the rites, no railway traffic into or out of Peking was allowed from the time the Emperor left his palace until his return to it.

To-day the vulgarity of the New World encroaches even upon the immemorial privacy of the Sacred City of Imperial China ; the moneyed stranger strolls within her gates—strangers who, in their superior enlightenment, on one occasion danced hilariously upon the marble altar of one of the highest forms of divine worship known to man—and many of her ancient mysteries now stand revealed to any curious eye. But there still remains one part of the Forbidden City to which no permits are issued in any circumstances.

A high red wall and a sealed gate—the Gate of

Resplendent Brilliancy—enclose from unauthorised eyes this last stronghold of mystery in once mysterious Peking. Shut away behind that wall lives the deposed Manchu Emperor. To such pathetic proportions has shrunk the mighty Manchu Empire. In this tiny world, occupying less than half a square mile, the Emperor and his Court still keep up a semblance of the old regime. Edicts are issued from the Dragon Throne, under the old reigning title; princes make obeisance to their sovereign; eunuchs serve him in official robes.

That much of what goes on behind those inscrutable walls we may guess; more than that no one outside the Imperial Court can tell. The mysteries of this make-believe kingdom are not for Western eyes. Let China keep this last precious fragment of a splendour the mass of her people have grown too "progressive" to appreciate. Instead of regretting that we are shut out, let us make the most of the few forbidden places left to us; they are so few, and the world promises to be so much less alluring when all are freely open to the general public.

CHAPTER VIII

ENIGMAS OF ISLAM AND THE NEAR EAST

SOME twenty miles to the eastwards of Jiddah, the Red Sea port of Arabia, the mountains rise on the coastal plain ; and hidden at the distance of a further twenty miles, among winding chains of barren mountains, its people cut off from free intercourse with the outside world by encircling deserts, lies the third of Asia's Forbidden Cities—mysterious Meccah, the sacred city of Islam, whose secrets remained inviolate for many hundreds of years.

Mohammedans believe to this day that to enter Meccah is forbidden by God to all who do not believe in the tenets of the Islamic faith, which is to say, to upwards of four-fifths of mankind. Until comparatively recently torture and death awaited any interloper rash enough to attempt to pry into the mysteries of the Muslims' Holy City, and no one not a Muslim knew what mysteries lay within its ancient walls. Accordingly Meccah remained for centuries a source of unending speculation, a city of legend and romance, so sacred and possessing such mysterious powers that it is the ambition and earnest endeavour of every Muslim, however far he may dwell beyond the confines of Arabia, to make the holy Hajj to it before he dies.

From the farthest limits of Asia, year after year down the ages, have come the faithful pilgrims, many of them

travelling thousands of miles even to reach Arabia, where to join the annual Hajj.

Over the burning desert sand, home of the carrion vulture, they have come, pressing onward under the blistering sun, with words of praise to God on their lips. It seems that they are on the very road to Paradise. One exhausted, falls, shudders, and dies. Another, with foaming jaws, drops among the feet of the onward-moving camels, and, with contorted limbs, shrieks still : " Here am I, O God ! At Thy command ! " Here a poor wretch, straying a little apart from the crowded track, falls with a robber's knife in his heart, and while the heedless crowds pass on, his meagre purse is torn from his neck, and his lifeless body is left to the jackals and vultures.

Thousands have died on that journey of faith, perished of hunger, thirst and exhaustion ; wiped out by the wholesale epidemics which have so frequently followed in the pilgrims' train. But still they come, and will continue to do so, drawn by the irresistible magnet of Meccah.

" Whoever patiently abides for one hour in Meccah, the fire (of Jehannam) shall be put from him for a period of one hundred years," said the prophet. And so great are the powers attributed to the Holy City that it is believed that the reward for good deeds done in Meccah will be double that awarded for similar deeds done elsewhere. Moreover, every Muslim who has won his right to the green turban of those who have successfully completed the Hajj believes himself assured of a place in Paradise.

Even the territory for some twenty miles from the centre of Meccah is sacred ; in it no fighting may take place ; no living thing may be killed, save animals for food, or

vermin ; no plant may be cut down. At some distance before entering the sacred limits, the Hajji assumes the *ihram*, the only garment in which it is lawful to make the pilgrimage to the heart of Islam's mystery.

From the moment when the Hajji assumes the *ihram* he must regulate his life anew to a great extent. Many little matters which may have been his daily habit must be altered until he is able to discard the pilgrim's garb. It is unlawful for him to wear silk or any garment which contains a seam ; to cover his head ; to cut his hair or nails ; or to shave. He may not hunt, kill, drive roughly away or frighten any creature save dangerous animals ; not cut grass, not a tree nor a plant of any kind, within the Haram limits. He may use no perfume. He may not perform the sexual act.

Infringement of most of these rules may be atoned for by means of appropriate sacrifices or offerings, but for infringement of the last named there is no atonement. A single lapse in this direction renders the culprit's pilgrimage null and void, and he must commence it all over again.

According to Arab belief, the breathless pit walled in by living rock, which is the Valley of Meccah, knew the tread of human feet at the very dawn of history. For, it is said, Adam, at the command of God, rebuilt here the holy Kaaba, which had originally been built by the angels before the creation of man, but which had, presumably, fallen into ruins.

Leaving out of account the innumerable legends of the city's origin, it is certain that Meccah must be one of the oldest inhabited places in the world. For it is known from the writings of pre-Islamic Arabs that a temple stood in the Valley of Meccah, long before that valley became the birthplace of the Prophet of

Allah. It was the custom of the pagan Arabs to make pilgrimage to this spot, where men and women performed the circuit of the Kaaba in a state of complete nudity.

In recent years various Europeans have succeeded in performing the Hajj in disguise, and at least one has penetrated into the very Kaaba itself, the Holy of holies of the Great Mosque of Meccah. But although to some extent Meccah has thereby been unmasked, the Holy City of Islam has its secrets yet ; it remains essentially a place of mystery.

The largest city in Arabia, although well-built for an Eastern town, is far from being beautiful. It is a little old ugly Arab town, bare of ornament, but full of fascination. No delicate minarets or splendid turrets embellish the city's unimpressive outline ; no grateful greenness of gardens breaks the sterility of its rock-bound limits ; yet it is the bourne of the dearest earthly hopes of millions of human beings.

Hundreds of Meccah's inhabitants have never been outside that rock-walled pit, save to make the two-day journey to Arafa for the annual pilgrimage.

The most sacred, and the most secret, place in Meccah is, of course, the Great Mosque, the very centre of the universe, according to Muslim belief. And in the centre of the Great Mosque is a great gravel-strewn courtyard, over 4½ acres in extent, where stands the most closely guarded mystery of Islam—the Kaaba, the House of God.

In the attempt to reach this great black-draped cube, tens of thousands, perhaps millions, of men have prematurely forfeited their lives ; seeing it, unnumbered millions have felt themselves to be on the very threshold of Paradise.

The Kaaba stands with the simple, massive grandeur of a solitary rock in the midst of the ocean—an expressive symbol of the unity of that God whose House it is. Aloof and mysterious it seems, reared up majestically in the centre of the great open quadrangle ; and there are few more impressive sights in the world than that of the great annual festival, when round and round the base of the House of God hurry the eager Hajjis, uttering their pitiful supplication : " O God ! grant us, in the world, good ; and in the hereafter, good ; and save us from the punishment of the fire ! "

Two stones of the Kaaba are deemed particularly sacred. In its eastern corner is set the holy Black Stone, which every Hajji attempts to kiss before he leaves the Mosque. Innumerable legends cluster round this particular peculiar-looking stone, all more or less improbable to Western thought, and its real nature and origin remain the ancient secret of Meccah. The second stone which comes in for special veneration on the part of the Faithful is built into the southern angle of the Kaaba, called the Yemen Corner. Equally mysterious in origin, this latter stone must only be stroked by the hands of the pilgrims, not kissed.

No one can say what the Kaaba does, or does not, contain. The full tale of its contents is one of the most sacred mysteries of the East. Legend, however, is not lacking. It is said that hidden somewhere within the House of God is a great store of treasure—gold and silver and gems, and valuable books also—for the succour of Islam in an extremity. The existence of such a treasure hoard seems extremely probable, though, as far as is known, no man has ever set eyes on it. The truth about the Kaaba's secret, say the Muslims, is known only to God, who knows all things.

Arabia, pre-eminent in the Near East as the land of exotic legend and romance, contains no lack of mysteries in addition to those of the Forbidden City of Meccah. For centuries one of the greatest enigmas of Arabia the Happy has been the great South Desert, known to the Arabs as the Empty Quarter.

Many are the lurid stories of the horrors of this vast waterless waste. It is said that no man who ventures too far into it returns alive, and concerning it tales of the weird and mysterious abound. Reports tell, for instance, of mysterious ruins in the heart of the further sands, and of a great block of metal as large as a camel.

In this howling desert, it is said, the very stones are animated with mysterious powers, so that they move about of themselves, leaving a visible track in the sand. The Marri guide of Major Cheesman—one of the earliest modern explorers in unknown Arabia—traced for him the pattern of the track made by these " walking stones," and his drawing of it resembles, as much as anything else, a long and very curly tail, having in it several irregular loops. The Marri described these " walking stones " as being round and about the size of hen's egg, and he later produced an oval pebble of vein-quartz which he said was one of the kind that walk.

Mr. H. St. John Philby, who followed Cheesman in another attempt to solve the mystery of the Empty Quarter, brought back several " walking stones." The largest was found by two members of the party, who first saw the tracks, and then tracked it down, at Hibaka Qa' amiyat.

The Arabs say that the animation of these stones is the work of spirits, which they believe to abound in the " Land of Thirst." These mischievous jinns are held

responsible for another curious mystery of the great Southern Desert of Arabia. For, not content with sending stones upon unnatural journeys, they are said to play tricks even with the sands of the desert, in order to terrify the nomad tribesmen.

Sands thus utilised as instruments of terror periodically emit weird booming sounds, to the great alarm of all who hear them. Both Mr. Bertram Thomas and Mr. Philby heard these "singing sands" in Southern Arabia. The latter describes his experience in the Rub' al Khali in the following words :

"Quite suddenly the great amphitheatre began to boom and drone with a sound not unlike that of a siren or perhaps an aeroplane engine—quite a musical, pleasing, rhythmic sound of astonishing depth."

This eerie concert continued for about four minutes, and was repeated at intervals several times during the period while the expedition remained camped near the spot from which the sounds came. Philby records his conclusion that the noise was obviously produced by areas of sand being set in motion on a slope. But why certain sands, thus caused to slide, should emit these "singing" sounds, while others similarly disturbed remain silent, is a mystery which science has yet to solve.

Here, too, somewhere amid the eternal emptiness of the district of Khiran, is the site of the legendary city of Aubar, or Wubar, one of the greatest capitals of prehistoric Arabia. Concerning the vanished splendours of this mysterious stronghold, an ancient ballad still current among the Arabs states :

> From Qariya strikes the sun upon the town ;
> Blame not the guide who vainly seeks it now,
> Since the Destroying Power laid it low,
> Sparing nor cotton smock nor silken gown.

Tradition has it that in times long gone there reigned over these parts a great king named 'Ad ibn Shaddad, whose capital was at Wubar in the Southern Sands, near the borders of Hadhr al Maut. Glorying in his power and in the extent and prosperity of his dominions, this monarch forgot his God, and regardless of the warnings administered to him by the prophet Hud, set out to make his central city an earthly paradise. Among the gardens he laid out for his pleasure he surrounded himself with a princely bodyguard of 2000 picked warriors, a stable of 2000 matchless horses, and a bevy of 2000 maidens, " of comely breast and rounded hips," the most beautiful in the world.

But there were limits to Allah's patience, and the presumptuous ruler transgressed them. At last Allah waxed wrath against him and smote him with the terrible west wind, which blew for eight days without respite, and buried 'Ad ibn Shaddad and all his glory in a sea of sand.

Many are the strange tales related of this ancient city, buried by the wrath of God. From here, it is said, come the mysterious " walking stones " ; somewhere in the neighbourhood, amid the enveloping sand, is alleged to be a life-size statue of a camel in some kind of metal ; and the wind blowing over the piled-up sand lays bare from time to time some relic of man's handiwork of past ages—a severed head or limb of a stone or marble statue.

But what the natives fear most about the supposed neighbourhood of the buried city is the Jinns or ghosts which are believed to frequent it, and which may be heard on a windy night moaning piteously over the fate which has overtaken the scene of their lives. It is a common saying among the Arabs of those parts that any-

one of weak courage chancing to be near that spot at night would be driven mad with fear.

It must indeed be an eerie spot that dead city of the past, far away from human ken, and it may be that the salty pools which surround it are all that is left of a great oasis of those times before the sand swept over the face of Southern Arabia.

But the actual situation and identity of the buried city of the Empty Quarter remains an unsolved mystery. When, in 1932, Philby was led to its supposed site by his native guides, the " ruins " proved to be no more than twin meteoric craters in the sand. Yet that the great king 'Ad ibn Shaddad of the riotous pleasure actually did exist once upon a time can scarcely be doubted. His terrible fate is mentioned more than once in the Quran. But who the 'Adites were and where they lived is a secret which the Empty Quarter hugs close.

To the north of Arabia lies another barren spot, the Syrian desert, where mystery takes the form of two extremely peculiar people. A certain sect of the Ismailis (who are descendants of the dreaded Assassins) are said to practise rites which are as extraordinary as they are secret, and which include the worship of a woman, one of their number.

It appears that among the villages of these people every female child born on the 27th of Rajab is set apart, and held to be the incarnation of the deity. She is called the Rozah. This incarnation is permitted to do no work ; her hair and nails are never cut ; and every man in the village will wear a piece of clothing or a hair from her body in his turban. She never marries, for there is no man that can marry God.

Yet in spite of all this, the Ismailis claim to be Muslims, and read the Quran. The inner mysteries of their faith

are shrouded in the closest secrecy. However, it is known that they have sacred books, but so strictly are their mysteries preserved that none of these has ever fallen into the hands of a European scholar.

The creed would seem to spring from some dim tradition of Astarte worship, or from that oldest and most universal of all religions, the veneration of the Mother Goddess. Accusations of extreme indecency in their hidden rites have been brought against these mysterious people. But these accusations are not universally accepted as being the truth. Gertrude Bell, among others, refutes their accuracy ; and as yet the world's knowledge of the Ismaili Rozah worshippers is so slight that they may well be accorded the benefit of the doubt.

The second Syrian mystery referred to is that of the Nosairis, who form part of the Shiite sect. The weirdest stories are told about these people. Muslims accuse them of being infidels who do not read the Quran or know the name of God. But, doubtless with their own motives, they have contrived to draw such a veil of secrecy about themselves that even to-day they remain among the most essentially mysterious people of Asia Minor.

The Nosairis are known to be divided into initiated and uninitiated. But the secrets of the former are so well kept that practically nothing is known about them outside the sect. It is said, however—with what truth it is difficult to say—that the initiated are magicians.

A queer story concerning the Nosairis, told to her by a Druse guide, is related by Gertrude Bell in her book of travel, *The Desert and the Sown.*

It happened that one winter the man, according to his story, was collecting the head-tax, at the time when the Nosairis hold a great feast. On the day before that

feast, when he was riding with two others in the hills, there fell a great quantity of snow, so that they could go no farther, and they sought shelter at the first village, in the house of the Sheikh of the village.

The Sheikh greeted them with hospitality and lodged them, but the next morning when they woke there was no man to be seen in the house, but only women.

Now it is a strict point of etiquette that a host shall personally attend to the making of coffee for his guests, and for this task to be left to the women of the household was a serious breach of hospitality.

Greatly affronted, therefore, the guests demanded to know the whereabouts of their hosts, only to be told by the women :

" We do not know what the men are doing, for they have gone to the house of the Sheikh of the Faith, and we are not allowed to enter."

Then the guide, his curiosity aroused, went softly to the house of the Sheikh of the Faith, and looked through the window, and to his astonishment, perceived the initiated with the Sheikh in their midst, and before him a bowl filled with wine and an empty jug. And the Sheikh put questions to the jug in a low tone, and out of the jug came back answers in a similar tone.

At that moment, however, one of the Nosairis looked up and saw the eavesdropper, and they all rushed out and seized him, and would have beaten him, but he cried out, " Oh, Sheikh, I am your guest ! " So the Shiekh of the Faith came out and raised his hand, and on the instant all those who had hold of the man released him. And the Sheikh fell at his feet and kissed his hands and the hem of his coat, and promised him ten mejides if he would not tell what he had seen.

This story of the Druse's contains just about all that

is known about the mysterious Nosairis. I give it here for what it is worth.

Asia Minor and the Near East in general are full of mystery men. One of the most startling mysteries of the whole of Asia is that of the Dervishes, religious fraternities whose secret rites and extraordinary powers have mystified the world for centuries.

Of Dervish orders thirty-two are commonly reckoned, but many have vanished or have been suppressed, and there are sub-orders innumerable. Each has a " rule " dating back to its founder, and a secret ritual which the members perform when they meet together in their convent. Sometimes this ritual consists simply in the repetition of sacred phrases, but often it may be a most elaborate and mysterious performance, such as the whirlings of the " Dancing Dervishes," the Mawlawis, an order founded by Jalal ud-Din ar-Rumi.

The main devotional exercise of all the orders of Dervishes is the *zikr*. Among the Dancing Dervishes this consists of a monotonous chant accompanied by a slow whirling movement round the floor, with eyes closed and arms extended. The ceremony continues until the participants fall into a cataleptic state.

Then there are the apparently miraculous performances of the Rifa'is or Howling Dervishes. In ecstasy they cut themselves with knives, eat live coals, handle red-hot iron, and devour serpents.

In addition, some of these orders possess the most mysterious powers of healing ; and the head of the Sa'dis, a sub-order, used, in Cairo, to ride over the bodies of his Dervishes without hurting them.

Each order is distinguished by a peculiar garb. Candidates for admission have to pass through a novitiate, more or less lengthy, in the mysteries of the order. The

secrets of each order are closely guarded from all but approved initiates, and their details remain a mystery to this day.

It is known, however, that in the initial covenant the neophyte repents of his past sins and takes the Sheikh of the order he enters, as his guide for the future. He then enters upon a course of instruction and discipline, called a "path," on which he advances through "diverse stations," or "passes," of the spiritual life.

Some of these initiations are said to be extremely severe in their final stages, and it is known that an aspirant to the order of the Mawlawis has to labour as a lay servitor of the lowest rank for 1001 days before he can be received. For one day's failure he must begin again from the beginning.

The supernormal powers of some of these Dervishes are as mysterious as they are extraordinary. The Abdals, for example, who may sometimes be seen wandering about the streets of Turkish cities in a state of complete nudity, live mainly in caves and other desert places. They shun intercourse with their fellow-men, but cultivate intimacy with wild beasts, being able to render even the most ferocious of these perfectly docile and harmless.

Many Dervishes, through intense concentration, develop abnormal powers of mind very similar to those of the lamas of Tibet. As an example of this ability, a story is told of two Dervishes who fell in with an assembly of people at a place occupied by prize-fighters. A contest was in progress between an extraordinarily powerful man and a spare, weak one, the former easily overcoming his adversary. Seeing this, one of the Dervishes proposed to his companion to aid the weak one by the power of

their wills ; and the two proceeded to concentrate their powers upon the weaker combatant.

Immediately a wonderful occurrence took place ; the thin, spare man seized upon his giant-like opponent and threw him to the ground with astonishing force, and the crowd cried out with astonishment, as he turned him over on his back and held him down with apparent ease.

The foregoing is a trivial instance, but it serves to indicate briefly the amazing powers of these mystery men, who can by their aid commune with persons widely separated from them, predict coming events, and aid those in whose welfare they take an interest. The founder of the Dancing Dervish order is said to have floated into the air by some process of levitation, during the devotional dances of his order.

The devotional exercises of the Dancing Dervishes are particularly extraordinary, ending in frightful scenes, wherein the Dervishes, carried away by a kind of ecstasy which they call *halat*, deliberately resort to the most appalling self-torture. Several cutlasses and other instruments of sharp-pointed steel are suspended in the niches of the hall, and when the moment arrives eight or nine of these weapons are taken down, heated red hot, and presented to the Sheikh.

This dignitary, after reciting some prayers and invoking the founder of the order, breathes on the instruments, and raising them slightly to his mouth, gives them to the Dervishes, who plead for them with the greatest eagerness.

Then these fanatics, transported by frenzy, seize upon the weapons, gloat upon them tenderly, lick them, bite them, hold them between their teeth, and end by cooling them in their mouths. Those who are unable to obtain

one of the heated weapons seize upon the cutlasses hanging on the wall, and with them stab and slash their own arms and legs unmercifully.

But the most mysterious part of this queer performance is the fact that, the orgy over, the Sheikh walks round the hall, visits each of the performers in turn, breathes upon their wounds, rubs them with saliva, prays over them, and promises them speedy cures. Twenty-four hours afterwards, it is said, there remains no sign of even the severest gashes and burns.

After the Rifa'is order of Dancing Dervishes, the Sa'dis have also the reputation of performing miracles very similar to the preceding, to which they add the power of finding out snakes, handling them, and even of eating them, without harm to themselves.

Somewhat akin to the Dervishes, but partaking much more definitely of the supernatural, are the saints of the Near East, in whose supernatural powers every Muslim believes implicitly.

Some of the powers accredited to these saints are certainly mysterious enough. The "People of the Footstep," for example, can travel hundreds of miles in a moment of time. Instances are recorded in Arabic history of pious men who were seen praying in the mosque of Bani 'Umazza in Damascus, or in that of 'Amr ibn El 'Aas in Fustat, in the same hour in which they were known to have been present in Meccah. By this it was known that they were *walis*, or saints, as only saints can be in two places practically at once.

A true *wali* is never ostentatiously pious. He is of humble appearance, does good by stealth, and is scrupulously punctual in all his religious duties. He exudes virtue, and it is a great blessing to a Muslim to

associate with a *wali*, or even to sit near him, so it is believed throughout Islam.

The knowledge that the *walis* are not easily to be distinguished is one of the reasons why the Muslims, excepting those of the lowest class, and those who have acquired the advantages of European training, are so polite and gentle to strangers of their faith. The stranger may be a *wali*. No man knows.

To what extent the miraculous powers of the Sufi saints have been exaggerated by superstition and over-enthusiasm it is impossible to say, but one mysterious phenomenon connected with these holy men is open to no doubt whatever. The phenomena of ecstatic states and visions are, of course, common to all religions, but probably the religion of Sufism exhibits a more remarkable development of these phenomena than any other.

The Quran, the very core of Islamic mysticism, regarded by all Muslims as the actual word of God, has mystical powers possessed by no other writings in the world ; it has been known to produce the most overpowering effects on the minds of the Faithful.

Miswar ibn Machramah, one of the earliest of the Sufi mystics, was unable to hear any verse of the Quran read, being so powerfully affected thereby as to fall senseless to the ground. And of such mysterious manifestations of the power of the " Word of God " numerous instances are on record.

When verses of the Quran, through frequent repetition, lost their power to awaken ecstasy, fragments of poems sufficed to produce it. Ibrahim ben Adham, the celebrated Sufi, once heard the following verses :

Everything is forgiven thee except estrangement from Us :
We pardon thee all the past, and only that remains which has escaped our eyes.

They immediately caused him to fall into a trance that lasted twenty-four hours.

But perhaps the most extreme example of these mysterious ecstasies is the case of Taury, who heard this verse recited :

> In my love to Thee I attained to a height
> Where to tread causes the senses to reel.

He immediately fell into an ecstatic condition, and ran into a field, where the newly-cut stubble lacerated his feet like knives. Here he ran about all night until the morning, and a few days afterwards he died.

Such reactions, of course, may be fairly closely paralleled to-day, in the behaviour of certain Western writers of the Truly Rural school. But remarkable as are the performances of some of these *literati* among their garden paths, none of their ecstasies has as yet been reported as proving fatal.

Among the most famous of all Sufis was the Persian Sheikh Suhrawardy, who was sentenced to death as a heretic in the twelfth century. Suhrawardy gave himself the title of " Disciple of the Spirit-World." He founded a sect who bore the name Ishrakiyya, " The Illumined," and for them he composed a mysterious work named " The Philosophy of Illumination," containing mystic and fantastic teaching of a very secret nature.

This teacher is said to have had the most extraordinary mystical powers, to have possessed the Philosopher's Stone, and to have been able to make gold. When finally sentenced to death by the famous Saladin, he was, by his own wish, shut up in a separate chamber and deprived of meat and drink until he passed into that other world for which he longed. His tomb is still

preserved in Aleppo, where the memory of him as " the murdered Suhrawardy " has by no means faded. The inhabitants assert that no tree or shrub will grow within the tomb-enclosure, from which weird sounds are still said to issue by night.

Asia Minor has its mystery mountain, just as has the Far East. None of the native peoples who behold from the surrounding plains and valleys the gleaming crest of Mount Ararat know it by that name. The Armenians call it Massis, or Massis Ljarn ; the Tartars and Turks, Aghri Dagh, the Painful Mountain ; the Persians, Koh-i-Nuh, the Mountain of Noah.

But all are united in regarding the volcanic mountain as an object of mystery and awe, for the tradition of its having been the landing-place of the Ark is firmly established in Armenia and its neighbouring countries. In fact, the belief that relics of Noah's remarkable vessel still remained on the summit of Ararat prevailed for many hundreds of years, such early chroniclers as Josephus recording that " it is said that there is still some part of this ship in Armenia at the mountain of the Cordyæans, and that some people carry off pieces of the bitumen, which they take away and use chiefly as amulets for the averting of mischief."

How much of truth there was in this tradition is a riddle to which we shall probably never know the answer. The modern Armenian tradition, of course, goes for little in settling the question, for that tradition cannot be shown to be older than our era, and is easily accounted for by the use of the word Ararat in the book of Genesis, which the Armenians, whether Jews or Christians, would naturally identify with their own Mount Ararat.

Whatever the truth may have been, once established,

the tradition held its own, and has been responsible for many fantastic legends connected with the mystery mountain of Asia Minor, some of them still lingering in Armenia, some only known to us through the notices of medieval travellers. The fact that a plank of the Ark had at some time been brought down from the summit by a pious monk and preserved in a church nearby, is recorded over and over again, with various more or less fanciful embellishments.

All who relate this particular tale are in agreement that the monk of pious memory achieved the ascent only by the special aid of God (through the good offices of an angel, according to the majority of accounts). For it was for centuries almost an article of faith with the Armenian Church that the top of Ararat is sacred, and therefore inaccessible to any man. The secrets of its snow-clad summit were wrapped in a mystery both actual and imagined.

Religious fancy has connected many places in the neighbourhood of Ararat with the Bible narrative. Not to speak of the several sites which have been suggested in the Araxes valley for the Garden of Eden, the Tartar name for the mountain is derived from two Armenian words which mean "he planted the vine"; it is taken to be the spot where Noah planted that first vineyard which is mentioned in Genesis, and until 1840, when the village was overwhelmed by a tremendous fall of rocks, hurled down by the great earthquake of that year, an ancient vine-stock, still bearing grapes was pointed out as that which had been planted by the patriarch's hands.

Apart from traditions associating it with Noah, innumerable legends cluster round the mountain, so great is the atmosphere of mystery which seems to have surrounded it from the very earliest of times.

Among the most interesting of these is one which connects Ararat with the so-called Chaldean worship of the stars, affirming that long, long ago there stood upon the mountain a great pillar, carved with a star ; and that before the birth of Christ, twelve wise men were stationed by this pillar to watch for the appearance of the Star in the East, which three of them followed, when it appeared, to Bethlehem.

The water of a spring which gushes out of the side of the Great Chasm, above the spot where the Convent of St. Jacob once stood, is credited with a peculiarly mysterious power. There is a bird, called by the Armenians *tetagush*, which pursues and feeds on the locusts whose swarms are such a plague in that country ; and it is said that the water of this sacred spring will attract the *tetagush*, and that when the locusts appear, the first thing to be done is to fetch a bottle of it and set it on the ground near them, taking care not to let it touch the earth upon its way. The bird immediately appears ; the locusts are devoured and the crops are saved.

It is believed in Armenia that Mount Ararat, rearing its proud head, mysterious and enigmatic, 17,000 feet above the level of the sea, is the exact centre of the earth ; and, certainly, its remarkable geographical position offers some justification for this claim, and for the semi-religious importance which, locally, is attached to the mountain.

Ararat stands in the centre of the longest line of the old continent, stretching from the Cape of Good Hope to the Behring Straits. It is also in the line of the great deserts and of the great inland seas, from Gibraltar to Lake Baikal, that is, in a line of almost continuous depressions. Furthermore, the sacred mountain is almost exactly equidistant from the Black Sea, the

Caspian, and the northern end of the great Mesopotamian Plain, which at no distant period was probably also part of the ocean bed.

That Ararat was once a volcano there is ample geological proof, but the period when its fires became extinct remains another mystery of the mountain ; it may have been six thousand or sixty thousand years ago. All that can be said is that no record exists of any eruption in historical times.

Stories indeed there are in the Armenian historians of mountains emitting fire and smoke—that is alleged to have happened in A.D. 441—and of darkness prevailing for thirty days, but they do not point to Ararat in particular, and are too vague to enable much store to be set by them. A German traveller named Reineggs alleges that in February 1785, from a great distance to the north-east, smoke and flames were seen issuing from Ararat, but nobody seems to have believed his entirely unconfirmed assertion.

Even were it not for the tradition that sanctifies Ararat on account of its association with the salvation of the human race from the Flood, the aspect of the mountain is, in itself, quite sufficient to invest Ararat with a mantle of mysterious legend. A phenomenon which is the first thing to strike every observer of the mountain is the fact that its peak by day is customarily veiled in wreathing clouds. The top is generally, at least during the summer and autumn months, perfectly clear during the night and until some time after dawn. By degrees, however, as the morning advances, the mountain draws its veil about it.

Springing out of a perfectly clear sky, usually about three or four hours after sunrise, these clouds hang round the crest till sunset. Covering only the topmost 3000

feet, they are constantly shifting in their places, but never quite disappear, until darkness falls upon the land, when, as mysteriously as they appeared, they vanish.

So striking a feature of Ararat could hardly have failed to give rise, among those who dwell in the shadow of the mountain, to the obvious inference that when dawn uncovers the nakedness of its peak, the spirit guardians of Ararat resort to this means of concealing its mysteries.

A deep, dark valley, sometimes called the Great Chasm, sometimes the Valley of St. Jacob, has long been accredited as the home of these mysterious guardians.

Rising, solitary and solemn, out of a vast sealike plain, Ararat stands, an object of mystery and veneration to three once great empires, the territories of the three chief forms of religious faith which possess western and northern Asia, those of Russia, Turkey, and Persia. When, in 1828, the Czar, Nicholas, having defeated the Persians, annexed the territory round Erivan, his advisors insisted on bringing Ararat within the Russian border, on account of the veneration wherewith it was regarded by all the surrounding races, and which is reflected on the sovereign who possesses it.

To the Armenians the mountain is the ancient sanctuary of their faith, the centre of their once famous kingdom, hallowed by a thousand traditions. To the neighbouring Persians, Turks, Tartars, and Kurds, Ararat, though less sacred, is still an object of awe and wonder from its size, its aspect, and the general acceptance among them of the tale of the Flood.

A remarkable result of this superstitious reverence for Ararat was, until comparatively recently, the scarcely shaken persuasion of its inaccessibility. A Persian Shah is said to have offered a substantial reward to anyone

who should scale it ; but the reward was never claimed. Even after several recorded ascents by Europeans it was long believed implicitly on the part of by far the majority of those living within sight of Ararat that no human foot since Father Noah's had trodden that sacred summit.

When, in 1876, Bryce, having just returned from his ascent of the mountain, mentioned the fact to the archimandrite of the monastery near the northern foot of Ararat, the venerable monk merely smiled sweetly.

" No," he replied, " that cannot be. No one has ever been there. It is impossible."

CHAPTER IX

MYSTERIES OF THE ELEPHANTS

NATURE has set us many problems in the persons of her animal creations, but, of all creatures, none is more mysterious in its ways than the Asiatic elephant. For centuries this great beast, the sole survivor of the mammoths of prehistoric days, has duzzled naturalists. It is a living enigma, an animal paradox.

In Asia no beast lives in closer contact with man, none renders him greater service; their association dates back to the earliest days of history. Yet, even to-day, no man possesses more than a superficial knowledge of the elephant; there remain many questions concerning it which no one can answer.

Small wonder that many native peoples venerate elephants as sacred, crediting the lord of the jungle with supernatural powers. He seems the living embodiment of animal wisdom. The incongruous mammoths of the past have disappeared, superseded in the march of evolution; but the elephant remains, surviving by virtue of its own sagacity. The accumulated knowledge and experience of a thousand thousand years, stored in his massive racial brain, has enabled him to survive where even mightier monsters than himself have gone down into oblivion, has made of him the undisputed monarch of the animal kingdom—a sovereign in his own right.

We may wonder whether we flatter ourselves when we say of some animal that it is "almost human," but certainly the elephant is strangely human-like in many of his ways. It is his uncanny reasoning power that makes of him such a fascinating study. Apparently slow and blundering, his brain is as quick and deft as his huge bulk can be, which can wheel and manœuvre in almost impenetrable jungle with the swiftness and *silence* of a mouse. Alone of all the animal kingdom, he will dress his own wounds, plugging them with clay, or filling his trunk with fine dust and spraying it over them to keep out the swarming flies.

If a tooth troubles him, an elephant will break off a piece of stick with his trunk and use it as a toothpick. In the same way he will wield a leafy branch as a fly-whisk, and use a long stick to scratch himself in some part of his great body that he could not otherwise reach. The workings of his brain are a thing to marvel at. Nothing will induce an elephant, a beast which even the terrible tiger does not willingly face, to step upon a man. His immense strength and matchless sagacity lay all created things under his thrall; yet an elephant is easily terrified by a small yapping dog; a harmless mouse will throw him into a panic.

Because of his unparalleled wisdom, his quickness to learn, and his immense usefulness to man in the East, no animal has been more closely studied. We know much about the elephant; yet still he provides us with new problems. The more we discover about his ways, the more mysterious he looms among the beasts of the earth.

Ask a dozen people how long an elephant lives, and you will probably get as many different replies. Some say as long as 150 years, others much less. The creature

himself provides no clue to the mystery. There is something ageless about his appearance, and at the same time infinitely old. Even an elephant calf trotting at its mother's side, bears an air of primeval age. These animals will not breed in captivity (and the reason for this is a mystery, for they take to domesticity with the utmost docility, and live happily in captivity for indefinite periods) ; so we have no record of an elephant which has been known from its birth.

Certainly, however, extraordinary cases of longevity in these beasts have been recorded. For example, when the British captured Ceylon, a memorandum was found which had been left by Colonel Robertson, who was in command of the island in 1799, stating that the elephant attached to the establishment at Matura had served under the Dutch for upwards of 140 years, during the entire period of occupation from the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1656, and had been found by them in the stables when they took possession of the island.

But stories of elephants living to an enormous age in India are difficult to check. Favourites of former days had special names, and as the vocabulary of names was limited, the custom was to give three or four elephants the same name, as, for instance, Pobun Peary No. 1, Pobun Peary No. 2, and so on. *Pobun* means " the wind," and any elephant in a depot possessing swift and easy paces would go by the name of Pobun ; and when Pobun 1 died Pobun 2 became 1, and so on.

These names were kept in the office books, while the casualty lists were kept merely on fly sheets, which after a time would be destroyed. It followed, therefore, that no check was possible to the true identity of any elephant ; and as no trace could be found except in the

office books, which simply showed the same names of elephants running on year after year, it appeared as if some of these beasts reached an extraordinary age.

An elephant's age is its own secret—a mystery of the jungle that gave it birth. Slow to reach maturity, once fully grown it has few enemies—save man—powerful enough to constitute any serious menace to its life, and the probability is that many do reach a great age. But the great grey beast one meets swaying through the dust of an Indian road may be 20 years old, or it may be 120. Nobody can tell.

It is known that the elephant is an exceptionally slow breeder, but even the exact period during which the female carries her young is a mystery. The gestation period is somewhere in the neighbourhood of two years ; but the creature's mysterious refusal to breed in captivity makes it impossible for this fact to be proved with any exactitude.

If he is mysterious in his birth, the elephant is even more so when his time comes to die. Like the wind, he comes and goes, whither and whence no man knows.

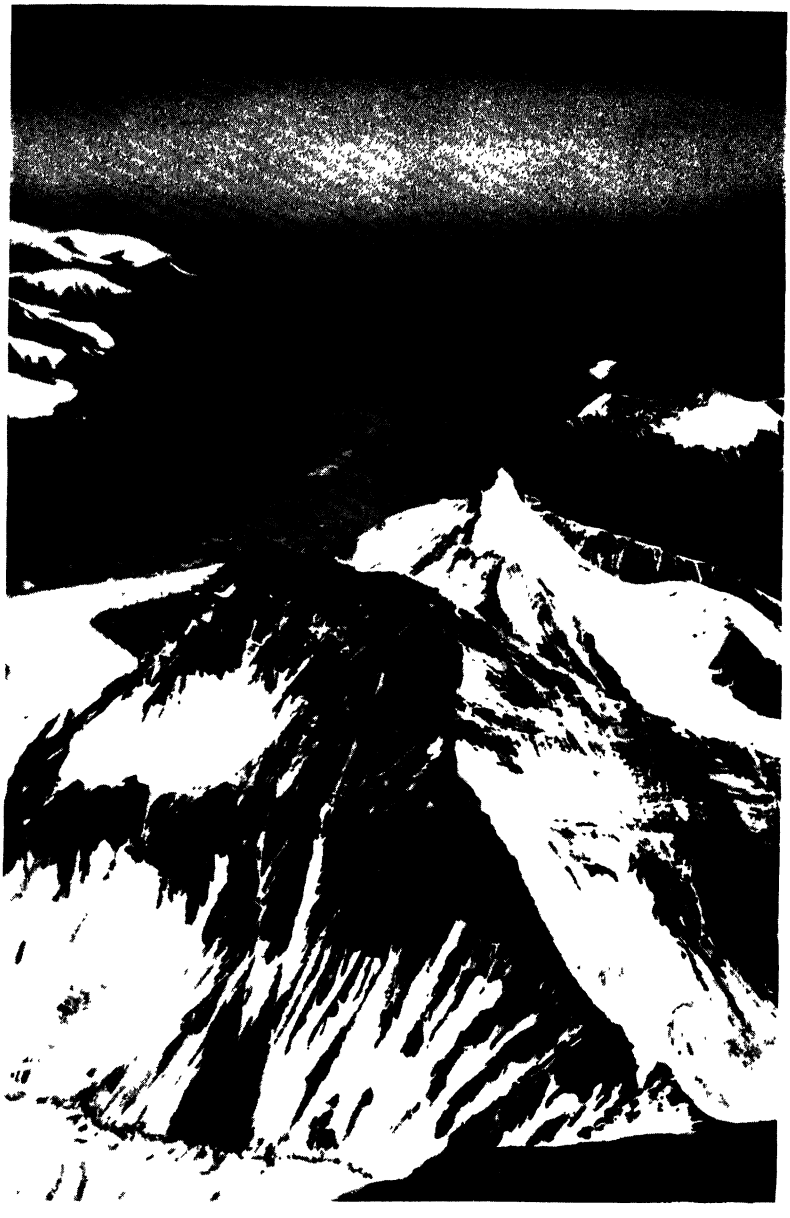
There is, or used to be, a saying in our own country that no one ever saw a dead donkey or a dead postboy. In the East it might be also added that no one ever sees a dead elephant. Many sportsmen and others, who have spent a lifetime wandering in jungles infested with wild elephants, have wondered what becomes of the remains of these pachyderms which die a natural death. Sanderson, Sir Samuel Baker, and many other famous hunters, all say that they never came across a dead elephant, except those which had obviously met their ends at the hands of some hunter.

Attempts have been made to explain this mysterious absence from the haunts of elephants of any remains of their dead, by stating that, when the flesh has been disposed of by carnivorous animals and birds, deer and oxen chew and scatter the dismembered bones, the remnants of which are soon hidden by the fast-growing jungle. But, considering the size and nature of an elephant's bones, and particularly of the tusks, this explanation takes a good deal of believing.

A professional elephant hunter with a lifetime's experience behind him, with whom I discussed this mystery, scouted the possibility of even a wild buffalo being able to demolish the skull of an old bull elephant.

Moreover, during the opening up of Assam and Burma—countries where wild elephants are probably more numerous even than in Ceylon and Southern India—hundreds of men have been employed in cutting traces through the savannahs, in recent years ; white men have been traversing these continually at all seasons; and under their direction vast areas of jungle have been burnt annually. Yet engineers in charge of this work have stated that never have they come across the body of an elephant which had died a natural death, though they had seen hundreds of carcasses of deer, gaur, gayal, buffalo, and tsine lying dead—and also the remains of elephants which had been killed by themselves and others.

What, then, becomes of the bones of those elephants which die of old age or disease ? It is impossible to believe that deer or wild cattle can demolish the enormous skull and pelvis of an elephant. The skeletons of elephants shot by sportsmen have been known to remain in evidence for as long as seven or eight years, although



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CARRYING STORES UP THE EAST RONGBUK GLACIER, EVEREST

subject yearly to inundation in the rains and to fire in the dry weather, and although they lay in districts swarming with deer and buffalo.

Even if the bones are eventually eaten, what becomes of the tusks? These would prove so tough a morsel as to need many years of patient gnawing to demolish. The truth is that we are all in the dark on this subject, and theories are founded on conjectures.

The natives of Assam, who, with their ancestors for centuries before them, have lived practically cheek by jowl with the elephant in his jungle fastnesses, say that these creatures bury their dead, and that this is the explanation of why no one ever sees a dead elephant other than the corpse of one slain by some hunter.

Certainly these beasts do exhibit more of what, perhaps, one may fitly term "civic spirit" than any other animal. Not only is the devotion of the females for their young extremely highly developed, but it is a striking characteristic of the elephant that adult beasts exhibit an extraordinary consideration for one another, and not only in cases where the two are mates. Many hunters have recorded the elephant's altruism in going to the aid of a companion in difficulties. One of a pair of these beasts, pursued by sportsmen, has been known to stop, at the risk of its own life, to assist the other out of a pit into which it had fallen; and similar cases are widely known in the East.

If, then, the elephant is so solicitous of its kind in life, there seems little that is incongruous in the idea that they should give decent burial to their dead. And as for the question of whether this animal is capable of doing such a thing, no one who has seen an elephant stacking teak, tree-felling, or doing any of the dozens of other exacting tasks which these animal labourers perform,

entirely on their own initiative throughout the East, can seriously doubt his ability to perform the task of interring one of his own brethren.

If there is anything in this theory—and many white hunters, of a generation less universally sceptical than the present one, have believed it as implicitly as the natives—there can be few more fantastic, and at the same time impressive scenes in the world than an elephant's funeral in the heart of the jungle. For the elephant has a regal dignity of its own, whatever it may be doing. An elephant weeps genuine tears moreover—as any *mahout* will tell you. The mourners at such last rites must present a strange spectacle indeed. But, as far as we know, no man has ever been witness to such a scene, and whether any man ever will is a question which must for the present remain unanswered.

The Singalese, however, have quite a different answer to the oft-debated question of what becomes of dead elephants. It is said in Ceylon that in the deep forests to the east of Adam's Peak lies a mysterious valley, only to be reached by a narrow pass between deep rock walls, and that therein is a quiet lake beside which all elephants desire to lie down and die in peace. So when sorely wounded, or very old, they seek to reach this happy valley and there leave their bones. But no man now living has ever been able to find this bourne whence no elephant returns.

Theories, founded on conjecture, are all we can advance in explanation of the age-old mystery of where the elephants die. But whatever the true solution may be, it seems singularly fitting, and entirely in keeping with his generally mysterious character, that no man should be permitted to set eyes on the body of the lord of the jungle fallen into dusty death.

All readers of Kipling's Jungle Books will know that in India there is a time-honoured saying, " When thou hast seen the elephants dance," which is to say " Never." That saying has reference to yet another mystery of the elephant's secret jungle life. It is said in the Chittagong hill tracts that, every so often, in response to some mysterious summons, all the wild elephants of all the hills congregate at a certain spot in the depths of the forest, consecrated to the purpose by ancient tradition, and there they solemnly dance together under the moon.

What the purpose of this dance may be not even the natives can tell you. But it is said that, once the urge is upon them, once the summons, whatever form it may take, has gone forth, nothing on earth will keep these beasts from the tryst. Over the hills, rolling and swaying they go, sliding down the mountain sides on their bellies, after the elephant's way, boldly swimming vast rivers, crashing through primeval jungle, till the dancing place is reached.

No man has witnessed that dance save the small brown Toomai of Kipling's story—and only the author knows whetherthat youthful hero ever had any existence outside the imagination of a genius. Not one in a hundred of all the numbers who know the Chittagong hills intimately have even seen one of these dance-floors. But here and there one meets a native who claims to have seen the secret dancing-place of the elephants ; and white men have certainly come across mysterious clearings in the jungle, clearings surrounded by lush tropical vegetation, yet wherein no single blade of grass nor any green thing save the largest trees has grown.

The floor of these clearings, they report, has been

pounded to the consistency of cement, apparently by the trampling of many feet; the bark of the few trees which stand within their boundaries has been rubbed smooth, as though by the friction of wrinkled, sandpapery hides; and, from every direction, elephant tracks lead through the forest to the spot.

Mysterious in birth, equally mysterious in death, the life of the elephants of Asia holds no more fascinating mystery than that of the midnight revels which take place in these chance-found jungle clearings.

Among the jungles of Siam we come upon another elephant mystery—the enigma of the sacred white elephant and the mystical veneration which surrounds it. These highly valued creatures are extremely rare, but the Siamese forests appear always to have produced occasional specimens—whence or how nobody knows; and the peculiar thing about them is that, while they are regarded as sacred and enormously prized by the Siamese they actually do appear to exercise at least some of the powers attributed to them.

A white elephant is always the property of the reigning monarch, and whenever one is reported every resource is set in motion to capture it and deliver it at the royal palace. For not only is the white elephant deemed sacred, it is supposed to have the power of bringing rain, and of commanding "good luck" generally. As is well known, one of the kings of Siam's proudest titles is "Lord of the White Elephants."

The sanctity of these mysterious beasts dates from the earliest period of Buddhist history. Indra himself rode a three-headed elephant. When the Gautama entered the womb of the queen to be born on earth for the last time it was in the form of an elephant; and as albinos are supposed to have authority over their race,

a " white " elephant, however few pale spots he may have, is revered throughout the land.

Actually, very few of these so-called white elephants are really white ; the lightest are usually a pale reddish brown, with a few white hairs or spots. In the most highly prized specimens the iris of the eye, usually regarded as the test of a true albino, is a pale Naples yellow.

But in the annals of Siam are records of real white elephants having been caught. In 1658, one of these records states, His Majesty King Phra Narai was informed that Kun Sri-k'aun charin, of the province of Sri-Sawat, had reported that, while he was out in the forests of Hui Sai, Nai Ahnsui had captured a white she-elephant over 60 inches high. Her ears, tail, and general appearance were beautiful. The capture was made on Tuesday, the " second lunation, second of the waning." The king gave orders that His Excellency the Governor of Tanahwasee (Tenasserim, now a British town in the province of the same name) and all skilled in the management of elephants should go and bring to him the white elephant.

His Majesty then returned to Ayuthia, the capital, whither the white elephant was brought, when a magnificent boat procession received her and brought her to a stable near the royal palace. The astrologers, sages, princes, and nobles were required to make demonstrations of gladness for three days, after which beautiful ornaments and utensils were made for the decoration and use of the sacred elephant.

The man who captured the white elephant was given an extraordinarily lengthy and high-sounding title, a present of a silver box with gold rims, a cotton and silk waist-cloth, and 96 dollars ; while to his wife the

king presented a silver bowl with lotus-petal rim, a calico waist-cloth, and 18 dollars. The man's father, the elephant driver, the elephant keeper, the bearer of the letter of information reporting the capture, and the men who delivered her all received presents also, amounting in all to 846 dollars in value.

Two years later, in 1660, is the record of another white elephant—this time a male—being captured. The record runs much the same, except that it says that Kun Mun, who had charge of the beast, " diligently taught it till it understood the human language and could do a number of deeds."

All who were under sentence of severe penalties for grave offences, and were in prison, and for whom none could have interceded, prepared vows and promised votive offerings to this white elephant, and then presented to the sacred beast their written petitions. The elephant took these petitions up in his trunk, raised it in adoration to the king, and then presented them to him, thus entreating for the petitioners' pardon. " Out of regard to the lordly beast," we are told, " His Majesty granted to the animal the request of the petitioners."

The centre of the elephant supply in Siam, whence come most of the rare white elephants, is the district from Paheng northwards to the boundary of Ngiou and the Lao States. While man's principal work in this country seems to have been the erection of temples, nature's supreme effort here appears to have been reserved for the multiplication of elephants. It is almost uninhabited territory, covered with thin teak forests, interspersed with open patches of country in which the grass grows to a height of from 10 to 15 feet. The heat is intense, and nothing but an elephant could get through this country without immense difficulty.

What is the secret of this inhospitable district that it produces the wonder-working white elephants of Siam?

So great is the respect felt for these mysterious beasts that their attendants approach them only on their knees with folded hands. They are washed daily with tamarind water, which toilet, incidentally, imparts to them a considerable increase in their much-admired fairness.

Over the royal stall in which the sacred elephant is kept is always hung a red tablet, on which is inscribed the elephant's name, which name is really a description of the animal wonder. The following, which hung over the stall of a " pure white " elephant in the royal stables of His Majesty King Chulalonkorn, is a typical example of one of these descriptive titles : " An elephant of beautiful colour ; hair, nails, and eyes are white. Perfection in form, with all signs of regularity of the high family. The colour of the skin is that of lotus. A descendant of the Brahmins. Acquired as property by the power and glory of the king for his service. Is equal to the crystal of the highest value. Is of the highest family of elephants of all in existence. A source of power of attraction of rain. It is as rare as the purest crystal of the highest value in the world."

Extraordinary stories are told of the mysterious powers of these white elephants. The annals of Siam are full of records of their wonderful achievements. Here is a curious occurrence, however, taken from quite a different and disinterested source. It is recorded by Carl Bock, a traveller who visited the royal court of Siam in 1881.

While Bock was at Bangkok, " Wilson's English

Circus" arrived in the capital, giving a series of performances which were witnessed by the king, princes, and nobility. One day the proprietor announced, in big posters and hand-bills, in Siamese and English, broadcast all over the town, that a "real white elephant" would take part in the performances.

This announcement aroused the curiosity of the people in no small measure, and the circus was crowded. After the usual "turns" two clowns came in and began jesting about the white elephant. "Have you seen the white elephant?" asked one of the other. "Yes; of course I have. The king has a stable full of them." "Oh, no," was the reply, "the king ain't got any real white ones; his are all chocolate. I will show you the only genuine white elephant in the world," and in came a small Indian elephant, appearing as white as snow; not a dark spot could be seen anywhere.

The animal went through its performance, grinding an organ, rolling a tub, and so on; but the truth gradually leaked out. The elephant left white marks on everything it touched; it was chalked all over; and when one clown told the other to rub his nose against the elephant and he "will leave his mark on you" an ominous silence was maintained by the mass of the people, only broken here and there by a suppressed titter.

The Siamese, it was plain, were annoyed that fun should be poked at their religious beliefs. They did not, however, openly resent the profane performance, but merely expressed their confident belief that the circus proprietor and the elephant would be punished by the real white elephants.

Their prophesy came true. The elephant died at sea, a few days afterwards, on the way to Singapore;

and Mr. Wilson himself died almost immediately on reaching there.

Most mysterious member of a mysterious race, the white elephant of Siam remains a living demonstration of the fact that, in Asia, Nature still keeps " something up her sleeve," still propounds riddles to which no man can find an answer.

CHAPTER X

JAVA'S MYSTERIOUS VALLEY OF DEATH

IT was in 1773 that Dr. Foerch, a surgeon to the Dutch East India Company, startled the world and made the blood run cold with a description of his discovery of Java's mysterious Valley of Death. Dr. Foerch described himself as standing in horror on a blasted plain, devoid of a single leaf or blade of greenness, and covered with skeletons of men, beasts and birds, with but one other object, a deadly Upas tree, in sight.

These trees, the Bohun Upas, are common in the east of Java. Looking very like an English elm, they grow to a height of 30 or 40 feet. If a branch of this tree is broken a milky juice runs out and rapidly condenses. This juice is an extremely potent poison ; mixed with the blood, it kills almost instantaneously.

The Upas poison is well known, and formerly was widely used in Java, where the sanctity of human life is not always allowed, among the natives, to interfere with such primary considerations as jealousy or vengeance. But in order to produce the desired effect the deadly juice must be introduced into the victim's blood, usually on the point of a curly-bladed *kris*, or Malay dagger ; and how it came about that this solitary tree, standing in the centre of the valley, should spread universal destruction for a radius of many miles about

it, presented one of the most extraordinary mysteries in the history of the Archipelago.

Many doubts, in fact, were cast upon Dr. Foerch's account of his gruesome find; but, a year later, an English surgeon stationed at Batavia issued a most interesting report on the vegetable poison, a report which, though it failed to do anything but still further to deepen the mystery, completely substantiated the "imaginative Dutchman's" story.

In his description of Java and its history, *Java Past and Present*, the author, D. M. Campbell, quotes in detail this surgeon's account of his investigations into the mystery of the island's Valley of Death. The surgeon's initials are given as "C. H.," but, unfortunately, there appears to be no record of his full name.

"In the year 1774," states C. H., "I was stationed at Batavia, as a surgeon in the service of the Dutch East India Company. During my residence there I received several different accounts of the Bohun Upas and the violent effects of its poison. They all seemed incredible to me, but raised my curiosity to so high a degree that I resolved to investigate this subject thoroughly, and to trust only to my own observations."

Armed with a permit from the Governor-General, and a recommendation to the old Malayan priest who lived on the nearest habitable spot to the tree, the Englishman set out to probe this mystery to the bottom. The gist of his own description of what he found, as quoted by Campbell and others, is as follows.

The Bohun Upas proved to be situated about twenty-seven leagues from Batavia. It was surrounded on all sides by a circle of high hills and mountains, and the country round it to the distance of 10 or 12 miles from the tree was entirely barren. Not a tree nor a shrub,

not even the least plant or grass was to be seen. The surgeon made a tour all round this perilous spot, at about 18 miles from the centre, and found the aspect on all sides equally dreary.

The easiest ascent of the hills was then, as it still is to-day, from that part where an old ecclesiastic dwelt ; and from this man's house, in those days, the criminals of Java were sent for the tree's poisonous juice, into which the points of all warlike weapons were dipped. This poison, C. H. learned, was of high value in the island, and its sale produced a considerable revenue for the Emperor.

" The poison which is produced from this tree," continues the investigator's account, " is a gum, which issues out from between the bark and the tree itself, like the camphor. Malefactors, who for their crimes are sentenced to death, are the only persons who fetch the poison, and this is the only chance they have of saving their lives. After sentence has been passed on them they are given the choice of dying by the executioner's hand or of going to the Upas tree for a box of the valuable poison. They commonly prefer the latter proposal, as there is not only some chance of preserving their lives, but also a certainty that, in case of their safe return, provision will be made for them in future by the Emperor."

Protected by a leather cap, with two sets of glasses before his eyes and a pair of leather gloves, the criminal, taking advantage of a favourable wind—that is a wind which blew towards the tree—set out on his hazardous mission, carrying with him a small wooden box for the reception of the poison.

According to the worthy priest who had dwelt on the outskirts of this grim place for upwards of thirty

years, during that time he had dismissed above seven hundred criminals into the dreadful valley, of whom scarcely two out of twenty had returned.

The surgeon adds that, from 15 to 18 miles round the tree, not only no human being could exist, but in that space of ground no living animal of any kind had ever been discovered. He was further assured by several persons "of undoubted veracity" that there were no fish in the waters, nor had any rat, mouse, or other vermin been seen there; and that when any birds fly so near this valley that the effluvium reaches them they fall a sacrifice to the effects of the poison.

This latter circumstance, it appears, had been ascertained by many delinquents, who in their turn had seen the birds drop down and had picked them up dead and brought them back to the old priest.

This violent effect of the poison at so great a distance from the tree certainly appears surprising and almost incredible, and especially when one considers that it was sometimes possible for malefactors who approached the fatal tree to return alive.

The scientifically acute mind of the Englishman, however, came very near to solving the mystery when he made the following observation, that the criminals were instructed to go with the wind and to return against it.

"When the wind continues to blow from the same quarter while the delinquent travels thirty or six and thirty miles," he states, "if he be of good constitution he certainly survives. But what proves the most destructive is that there is no dependence on the wind in that part of the world for any length of time. Whatever wind there is is generally slight and almost always shifty, seldom blowing long or steadily from the same quarter."

But the full explanation of the valley's deadliness escaped him, thorough as were the English surgeon's investigations into the nature of the Upas poison. He actually experimented with the effects of the poison on two of his own puppies—which incontinently died; and went so far as to attend the mass execution of a number of the Emperor's wives, the flagrancy of whose infidelities had outraged even the accommodating standards of a Malay native court.

These ladies were made publicly to pay the price of the one sin unforgivable in any land—that of being found out—by being bound each to a stake and then stabbed in the breast with a spear dipped in the deadly poison. The manner of their dying, according to this observer, was swift but not pleasant to witness.

The explanation given by the Malays themselves to account for the deadly nature of the valley of the Upas tree is that long ago the country round the tree was inhabited by a people strongly addicted to the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah—a vice which remains all too prevalent in mid-Java to-day. When the great Prophet determined not to suffer them to lead such detestable lives any longer, he applied to Allah to punish them. Whereupon Allah caused to grow out of the earth this tree, which destroyed them all and rendered the country uninhabitable for ever.

The grim mystery of that valley, hidden away among the mountains of a country which has well been described as the most beautiful in the world, long remained unsolved, and many were the victims that the valley continued to claim. Many, too, are the sinister stories which, even to-day, are told in Java about this sepulchre of a thousand bones.

It is said that, many years ago, a young British naval

officer, scornfully dismissing the reputation of the valley as mere native superstition, wagered that he would go to the Upas tree and return with one of its branches. When it was found that he was serious in his intention every effort was made to dissuade the young man from his crazy purpose—but in vain. He started out on his gamble with death, and, it happening that the wind was in a favourable quarter, was soon lost to sight. Before he had returned, however, the wind changed, blowing from diametrically the opposite direction. The lieutenant was never seen again.

It was not until comparatively recently that the secret of Java's mysterious Valley of Death was discovered. Lying on the mountain Dieng some nine or ten miles from Batavia is a barren valley, easily identifiable with that of Dr. Foerch and C. H., and of which all that they said of it is true. It is now known, however, that the deadly menace of this valley emanates, not from the tree which stands, or stood, in the middle of it, but everywhere from the ground.

This bare and desolate place stands in the midst of underground reservoirs of poisonous gases fatal to all living organisms. Into it, but only in the very early morning, and under the special guardianship of a European who lives near, the traveller can go. But if there is the slightest chance of a breeze springing up no one who does not leave the valley immediately has the slightest chance of ever doing so alive.

This, then, is the secret of the valley—the mystery which defied solution for so many years, and of which the Malays, with characteristic opportunism, made so grimly practical a use.

CHAPTER XI

THE RIDDLE OF EVEREST

ONE by one Nature's most impregnable strongholds have fallen to the assaults of ever-restless man; her most closely guarded secrets have at last been yielded to his enterprise and persistence. Dwarfed to the proportions of toiling ants by the empty immensity of their surroundings, men have stood upon the far poles of the earth; they have carved their way through unknown forests, which had defied intrusion a thousand thousand years. The world's widest deserts have been scored across and across by man's trails; his foot has trodden into submission the high heads of earth's ruggedest mountains.

So long and so dauntlessly has the work of exploring the face of the earth gone on that to-day there remain few places on the earth's surface on which the foot of man has never yet been set, and daily they grow fewer. Outstanding among these last unconquered fastnesses of the Unknown is Everest, the mystery mountain of Asia, highest in the world. Since the towering range of the Himalayas was first heaved up in the convulsive birth of the modern world no human foot has trodden the virgin snows of that 29,000 foot peak. What lies upon its summit no man knows.

The lofty mountain places of the earth have ever exercised a mystical fascination on the minds of men.

Perched upon some dizzy peak beneath the sky, sharing the world only with the lonely eagle, a man feels himself in touch with the mystery of life, closer to a revelation than ever before—even though still the solution to that mystery evades him. Even the midget peaks of Britain's mountains have this effect, as is well known. How much more so, then, the mighty crown of Everest, brooding in remote majesty over the spread littleness of the earth.

The effect of this mountain on all who have seen it, the topmost pinnacle of the earth's surface, has, indeed, always been tremendous. Nor is it simply the fact of its supreme height which impresses the senses—mere bulk alone can be singularly unimpressive to all but the most elementary minds. Always it is a consciousness of the awe-inspiring mystery which surrounds the mountain's majestic beauty that makes such an ineradicable impression on Everest's beholders.

So deep has been that impression on those who live their lives in the shadow of the mountain's soaring peak that to the Tibetans Everest has become a holy place, the " Throne of the Gods." Feeling its mystery, they have peopled it with their own mysteries, the gods and demons of the Lamaistic pantheon. Few Tibetans would dream of attempting to scale the mountain's crest. It is well known that the gods who have made Everest's remoteness their home fiercely drive off all intruders—a belief which it is difficult to refute, in view of the fate which has attended the efforts of each of the five expeditions which have attempted such an intrusion.

It is firmly believed among many of the natives of the locality, moreover, that should such an attempt ever succeed the wrath of the gods at this sacrilege would bring disaster on the land far and wide. For

this reason every obstacle is placed in the way of all would-be climbers of Everest, and the special permission of the Dalai Lama himself has had to be obtained by every expedition which has attempted the climb.

Native legends are easily discounted as mere superstition ; but the mysterious thing about Everest is that many white climbers on the icy shoulders of the mountain have been almost inclined to share the Tibetans' belief in the spirit guardians of the peak, and in unseen beings who thrust intruders back with supernatural hands.

For to the climber Everest seems to take on a personality. Weeks of battling with her moods, of fighting death on her wind-swept slopes, and facing defeat at the very moment of victory effect her human attackers in a strangely personal manner. They feel that not only are they fighting a mountain, but an evil and angry intelligence. And there are moments, on those agonising ridges over 20,000 feet up, when from lack of oxygen and physical exhaustion the mind rocks and plays strange fancies.

One day, in 1933, two men toiled like ants up the snowy fastnesses of the Forbidden Mountain. One of them became ill and turned back. The other, Frank Smythe, struggled on alone. Behind him stretched a chain of camps ; before him, just a tantalising 1000 feet ahead, the unconquered summit of Everest threw up its snow plume.

For every step he took Smythe breathed at least three times. But the mental strain, intensified by the thin air, was worse. He began to see things no man has seen before. Looking up, he perceived two frightful shapes, half hidden by the mist, hovering above the summit. He describes them as enormous, bloated,

beaked creatures, like phantom bats, which seemed to hang in the sky. He sat in the snow trying to reason it out. He knew these apparitions could not be there —but still he could see them. For a long time he watched them, mystified, then the mist swept over them and they vanished.

To Smythe also came that weird experience near the summit when, climbing alone and utterly exhausted, he was suddenly seized with a feeling that someone was climbing with him. As he climbed now, Smythe's loneliness suddenly vanished, and that Someone, walking close behind him on the ice, filled his whole mind. Was it the ghost of some gallant climber who had preceded him, returned to give him strength and courage? More than one man before him had started out on that hazardous climb and never returned.

So strong was Smythe's impression of an unseen companion that he felt he was roped to the person behind, and that if he fell the presence would support him. The feeling grew stronger. He became convinced that his companion was some friendly guide urging him on to victory. He frequently glanced over his shoulder, but could see nothing; yet so certain was he of being watched that when he halted for food he turned round with some in his hand and extended it gratefully to the unknown.

Only when Smythe was about to enter camp, after climbing down again, did his mysterious helper seem to vanish, leaving the climber strangely lonely.

Other climbers, too, before and after Smythe, have had uncanny experiences on the ice-draped precipices near Everest's summit. From slopes that appeared perfectly safe, avalanches have suddenly hurtled down just in time to bar their passage; some have seen weird

and malevolent shapes, figures of beings not known to exist, which have threatened and mocked at them; others have fancied they felt the drag of unseen hands holding them back from their objective.

The sceptical may pooh-pooh such stories as the results of light-headedness, brought on by over-exhaustion, snow-blindness, the thinness of the air at such terrific altitudes, and other privations endured by all who have approached within 2000 feet of the roof of the world. It is easy to dismiss them thus, far easier than to face them, and admit the possibility that the storm-mantled summit of Everest may conceal mysteries undreamed of in the philosophy of the West.

Yet the men who have reported these inexplicable things have, without exception, been picked climbers, the very cream of the world's mountaineers. They have been men to whom tremendous altitudes and the vast loneliness of mountain places were as familiar as the bustle of a crowded street; men in the pink of health, trained to a hair; and men given, moreover, to dealing with the concrete far more readily than with any abstractions.

Not that Everest has not provided mysteries as concrete as the most material-minded could desire, as, for example, the total disappearance of Mallory and Irvine, members of the 1924 expedition to the mountain.

Bad luck (or was it more than that—some power greater than their own?) had dogged the expedition ever since leaving Darjeeling. Snow-blindness, "altitude throat," numbing cold, avalanches, eternally raging winds, and the tremendous labour of climbing in an atmospheric pressure which thinned the blood to the consistency of water had worn out the toughest and fittest of them.

Undaunted, they had struggled onwards in a terrible fight against the elements; but once again Everest had proved too much for the mortals who, with sublime presumption, had dared to challenge the mountain demons of Tibet. The gleaming crest of the mysterious mountain seemed further away than ever, seemed to mock them in its lofty unattainability.

All had agreed with Bruce, the leader, that there was nothing to be gained by persisting any further in face of the imminent monsoon—all save one man, that is.

"I'm going to have a shot at the summit, whatever happens," had been Mallory's quiet announcement, and the clear-cut jaw of the slightly built young man had been set in a line of inflexible determination.

There were no heroics about this thin-faced young man. His words were quietly spoken—indeed, the whole party was too weary to speak much above a murmur—but there was about his announcement a ring of unshakable purpose. The Romans had a proverb: "Whom the gods wish to destroy they first drive mad." Perhaps the mysterious gods of Everest had chosen this method of dealing with the man who was daring to set his sacrilegious foot upon the "Throne of the Gods." But Mallory's madness, if madness it was, had more than a touch of the sublime about it.

This was the third expedition which George Leigh Mallory had accompanied to Everest. He was absolutely possessed with the idea of conquering the summit; climbing Everest was no mere incident in his life. This man knew well the dangers and difficulties before him. At the end of his first expedition to the Himalayas he had written that the highest of mountains is capable of "a severity so awful and so fatal that the wiser sort

of men do well to think and tremble even on the threshold of their high endeavour."

But in Mallory's mind was fixed the idea of " all or nothing " ; if he had to choose between the alternatives of turning back a third time or perishing undefeated on the peak he would not hesitate to choose the latter.

Twenty-two-year-old Andrew Irvine, Mallory's chosen companion, while younger and less experienced, and therefore less acutely aware of the risks before him, was no less determined to go " all out." To " have a shot at the summit " was his burning ambition, and now that the chance had come he welcomed it with almost boyish enthusiasm.

In the calm dawn of June 8th, 1924, the two men emerged from the tiny tent which was " Camp VI," 28,000 feet up on the shoulder of the mountain, and anxiously surveyed the weather prospects for the day. For it was the day which meant, to one of them at least, the crisis of a life's ambition.

The morning was brilliant, though with some mist trailing its pale scarves about the mysterious object of their goal ; and though delayed by some defect in their oxygen apparatus, which required adjustment, it was still early when the two climbers set out.

Behind them was Odell, waiting patiently at Camp V. It would have been better if they could have had him with them for three is the ideal number for a climbing party ; but the tiny tents held only two men. There were not enough porters to carry a second tent and their companion could only follow a day behind, acting as a kind of support.

Before them was the summit, looming mysteriously through the mist, alluring yet threatening in its eternal

remoteness. And up the last slope, that implacable enemy, mute, passive, yet savage, they toiled.

The lifting of the foot for each step entails a conscious and almost insupportable effort. The weight of the light ice-axe becomes, after a moment, too much for the arm to swing, for heart and lungs are striving desperately for oxygen, and the snow slope swims uncertainly before the eyes of the exhausted mountaineer. He doubles up, gasping and gasping, until presently his body ceases its clamouring for oxygen. He braces his tired and quivering muscles, grasps his axe, and swings it forward again into the green face of the ice.

Thus Smythe describes his experiences of ten years later, and thus these two gallant men forced themselves on, foot after laboured foot.

When last seen by their companion below they were distinctly higher on the mountain than any previous party had attained, and were apparently above all serious difficulty. The morning was beautiful, and the climbers seemed to have every condition in their favour. For a short time their dark figures stood out like tiny insects on the face of the great slope, then a drift of mist swept down on them blotting them from sight. They were never seen again.

The fate of Mallory and Irvine remains a mystery to this day, a mystery that can never now be solved. Eric Shipton, who, since climbing with Smythe on his grand attempt in 1934, went back to Everest with a reconnaissance party, says there are no insuperable difficulties on the final stage to the summit ; and, as we have already seen, the climbing conditions were perfect and the missing men beyond all serious difficulties known to exist on the peak, when they disappeared.

What unknown fate befell them up there on the eaves

of the world? Did their feet ever tread the immaculate snows of the summit, or did the mysterious guardians of the sacred mountain hurl these rash venturers down, with success within an inch of their grasp? These are questions to which Everest alone knows the answer.

Nine years later, in 1933, an ice-axe belonging to one of the climbers was picked up among the rocks at 27,000 feet, but whether these strong and hardy men fell before reaching their goal or perished on their return from a belated victory, and in what manner they met their end cannot be proved.

No wonder mighty Everest has developed a personality of her own: like some disdainful woman, the more we come to know her, the more secrets she discovers to our bewildered minds. The unquenchable flame of her fascination has drawn men from across the world to abandon bodily safety and comfort for the rigours and perils of her conquest.

These men have answered the call of the mountain, not with any idea of gain or service—for though success is bound to be of some small service to science its value must be infinitesimal in proportion to its immense cost in labour, endeavour, and hard cash—but purely out of a spirit of high adventure, out of their powerlessness to resist the challenge of her mystery.

The test of fitness even to approach the coveted summit is perhaps the severest, physically and mentally, of any known man. But though only a select few, the very pick of the world's mountaineers, have ever succeeded in attaining within a thousand feet of the peak, the strange lure of Everest has gone forth and has been responded to by men of an extraordinary variety of types. The mountain's mysterious summons has produced the most astonishing results.

A few years ago this soaring peak, brooding eternally over Central Asia, sent forth its call, and an obscure man, leading a humdrum existence far across the seas, in England, suddenly laid down his work, severed at a stroke every tie of his daily life, and boarded an aeroplane for India.

Influence he had none, and in order even to approach the sacred mountain it was necessary for him to use subterfuge. Disguised as an Indian porter, this modern pilgrim set out for a wild and desolate country in which a white man would have been turned back on sight, if nothing worse had befallen him at the hands of the cruel and fanatical Tibetan lamas.

Why he went he could have told as little, probably, as he could foresee the end of his journey. But the call of Everest was upon him, and on he toiled through the frozen passes, living meagrely on a few dates and a handful of cereals, blown upon by the raging winds, menaced by high-hung avalanche and yawning crevasse —a lonely and faithful figure, trudging on to his mysterious tryst.

Out of the unknown he came, drawn by the irresistible lure of the syren peak ; into the unknown he vanished as mysteriously, and was gone.

In 1935 Shipton's reconnaissance party came upon the relics of a man, believed to be all that was left of this mysterious traveller, below the Rongbuk glacier on the north side of Everest. The story of his journey thus far, the impulse which had driven him to make it, the manner of its ending, all are unknown. Even his name is uncertain. To the little party of climbers who followed him Everest presented his pitiful remains as one more unanswerable riddle to add to the long list with which the mountain's history is studded.

When that list will be closed who can say? As these lines are written yet another expedition, previously described by its experienced leader, Hugh Ruttledge, as "the strongest that could possibly be got together for the special purpose of climbing Mount Everest," is on its way home in defeat. High hopes went with them when the party set out in the spring of this year; it was believed that the 1936 attempt had better prospects of success than any previous party in the history of Everest expeditions. But the mountain has triumphed again.

The snow gods keep their secret yet. Far poised above the little lives of men, Everest the Unknown broods on, challenging, alluring, mysterious still—the eternal question-mark of Asia.

CHAPTER XII

THE INSCRUTABLE CITY OF ANGKOR THOM

ONE sweltering day in 1858 a French naturalist wandering in the jungles of Cambodia stumbled upon a magnificent pile of architecture, half submerged in the green tide of tropical vegetation which fills the valley of the Mekong. Perfectly unexpectedly, and after days of travel during which he had seen no larger or more elaborate construction than a bamboo hut, he saw before him, thrusting through the jungle, such beauty and such grandeur as it seemed impossible could exist unknown anywhere in the world.

In an ecstasy the naturalist sprang forward, to meet marvel after marvel. It was unbelievable. He questioned the brown natives of the jungle, who told him that the temples had always been there and that the gods had built them for their own home, his informants proving their statements by ancient legends.

Here was a first-class mystery. The native legends were obviously substitutes for the facts of which they were in ignorance. Who then were the builders of these magnificent palaces, temples, and towers, hidden so deep in the untrodden jungle? From his own experience of the native Cambodians it was obvious to the discoverer of the ruins that the splendid city of which they had once formed part had never been raised by any such as they.

Why had this vast and carefully-planned city been

deserted and its beauty allowed to crumble to decay? When had that exodus taken place? How could such a people and their city have contrived to remain unknown, to have fallen into such obscurity that even those who dwelt on the same spot where once their busy lives had been led had now no memory of their race?

France, when she learned of this remarkable discovery, was thrilled. Such an artistic treasure must not be allowed to moulder into dust and be lost beneath the roots and tendrils of the all-enveloping jungle. Some political hocus-pocus was arranged; Siam, to whom the territory of the marvellous ruins belonged, was given a *quid pro quo* in exchange, and the long-lost city of Angkor Thom, with its glorious Temple of the Vat, passed into the appreciative hands of the art-loving French.

Much patient and careful work has been done at Angkor since the memorable day when an adventurous naturalist's lucky accident first stirred the veil of forgetfulness which had hidden it from the eyes and memory of man for some seven centuries. But, much as has painstaking archæological research revealed about the daily lives of the builders of those fabulous temples, Angkor the Magnificent keeps its most important secrets to this day.

This much Angkor itself, together with ancient Chinese records relating to its later days, has discovered to those who know how to extract their meanings from bas-relief and hieroglyphic. In Cambodia, Indo-China, lived and developed a race whose history began at least five hundred years before the Christian era. Improving in all matters which go to make a nation, this race arrived at a period of high development in the eighth and ninth centuries. They became implacable warriors,

ambitious artists, exponents of wealth and luxury. Under the direction of powerful kings they built during four centuries one of the most grandiose cities of antiquity, Angkor Thom, adding to it incredibly magnificent temples throughout the surrounding country.

In these surroundings the race—called Khmers—lived a life of luxury, pomp and display which has not been exceeded at any time in any part of the world. And all of this was at a time when Europe was sunk in the dull apathy of the Dark Ages, when France was a savage country, Britain uncivilised, Germany a hinterland of barbarous hordes. In Asia the Khmers were known, envied, and feared. Mighty China sent her ambassadors there ; but Europe knew nothing of the growth of this powerful Asiatic kingdom.

To maintain their wealth the Khmers' kings had to protect their land against invading nations of the Indo-China peninsula, and for centuries the might of their arms made them the victors, enriched with treasure and captives. At length, however, came a turn in the fortunes of the Khmers. They lost, first to the people on the east, and then, in the hour of their depletion, fell completely into the hands of victorious Siam. Their final and conclusive overthrow occurred in the late twelve hundreds. What happened then has always been a mystery ; it remains the secret of Angkor.

When overcome, the population was enormous, magnificently housed, following the gracious arts of cultivated taste. Their temples and palaces were of a grandeur and of a number unsurpassed in the history of mankind. Then all at once this whole civilisation was blotted out. The jungle crept in to cover the work of centuries. The Khmers were gone, their temples and palaces were swallowed up by a relentless sea of verdure,

and they and all their works, leaving no history behind them, were completely forgotten of man.

That such a race, a people who must have made so decisive a mark on the history of their times, could thus have disappeared without record or trace seems totally impossible when one considers how much is known to-day of even such obscure and evanescent peoples as palæolithic man and many vanished tribes of small importance. Yet this is what has happened to the Khmers.

Who were these people, these mighty warriors, these exquisite artists in enduring stone, this wealthy and sophisticated nation whose name must once have been glorious throughout civilised Asia? Whence came they? Whither did they go? To discover for certain the answers to these questions might well be to throw an entirely fresh light on the history of Man and his still uncertain origin.

It has been said that these long-forgotten Khmers were a mongrel nation, composed of Malay, Hindu, and Chinese travellers who had gravitated to this country, drawn by reports of its great natural wealth, who had found an indigenous population there, and had imposed themselves upon it. It is, to say the least of it however, extremely improbable that a mixture of adventurers of such different colours and creeds would ever have developed into a homogeneous and powerful nation capable of producing such a civilisation as that of Angkor at its best.

Nor is it compatible with even the most cursory consideration of the indigenous inhabitants of Cambodia that they are descendants of the people who raised those splendid temples of Angkor, the kings who "gloried and drank deep" within its palace courts. It is impos-

sible to believe that the Cambodian of to-day, half naked, gently inert in mind, quietly content to drift with the tide of life in his easy, comfortable land, can be of the original blood that fought such glorious battles to win luxury and puissance.

No, one cannot feel that the magnificent Khmers were simply indigenous Cambodians at a level of development long forgotten by the present easy-going race. But so effectually has this mysterious people destroyed all records of its identity—it is evident that even the skeletons, which would have told the story of the race to the present-day anthropologist, must have been cremated—that the truth of whom they were and whence they came remains one of the most fascinating problems of the East..

As we wondering moderns see it, the race came from nowhere more substantial than the caves of legend, rose to preposterous heights of development, constructed a dreamland of palaces and temples—and then vanished into the legend-land from whence they had come. But of the life they lived at Angkor, between their mysterious arrival and their equally mysterious departure, the works which they left behind them tell us a good deal.

The King was arrayed in a splendour undreamed of, the innumerable ladies of his Court lived in a luxury unfathomable and smiled happily from among their jewels. Their temples were the repository of wealth untold, and surpassed in size any others known—the moat which surrounds Angkor Vat is a lake in width and measures some 3 miles round. And all this indulgence was surrounded by the ever-productive rice-fields, so well equipped by nature that it is probable that the wealth of the people came largely from this source.

It is not my intention to describe here all the glories of Angkor : to do so would require a volume to itself, and several admirable works on this subject already exist. But some mention of the innumerable carvings which adorn the palaces and temples will indicate the source of such information as I can give you about the forgotten civilisation which raised these towers as symbols of its pride.

Almost every square foot of the inner surface of the buildings of Angkor are covered with exquisite carvings, softening the outlines of the grey stone as with a veil of delicate lace. The bas-reliefs show warlike qualities highly developed. War seems to have been the actuating motive of both King and populace. The war spirit is dominant even in religious scenes.

Upon the wall of the first long gallery of the Vat the great army of the Khmers passes in review, decorating the gallery of history with one of the most vivid reliefs in all the monuments left by ancient races in any part of the world. Khmer history, as far as we know, shows no interval of peace long enough for unnecessary processions ; theirs were always bellicose in intent and eagerly marching to meet a foe. Cambodia in the centuries of its wealth and power was ever at war, either to subdue and possess its neighbours or to defend itself against the attacks of envious foreign powers.

Here we see " the war-horse who smelleth the battle afar off," curvetting in a manner most spirited and powerful. He is like the horses of the Romans, and bears himself with a pride not excelled even by the general on his back. From whence came these splendid horses and whither they disappeared is another mystery. For the horses of to-day in Cambodia are queer little things, as small as ponies and as quiet as sheep.

But, in this long army passing by, the amount that thrills is the magnificent elephant. He is an elephant transfigured by dreams of triumph ; he lifts his head haughtily to throw high in air his curving trunk. He passes entirely conscious that he carries on his mighty back a god-like leader, standing, not supinely seated, as he goes forth to war. One foot of this martial monarch is planted on the animal's croup, the other is on the saddle, while about him are the umbrellas of State, the universal insignia of rank throughout the East.

The file of soldiers which marches behind extends an immeasurable distance, proud, stalwart men dressed in close-wound sarongs, and shouldering arms with which they are sure of gaining victory. There is a military band, of course, and the troops are marching in time to the regular beat of tom-toms.

An interesting touch of realism is given by the group of camp-followers which accompanies this splendid army, as such armies always have been followed—workers, sutlers, and ladies of light allure. These last are springing forward with the grace and spirit of Botticelli maidens, their delicate draperies clinging, their feet lightly tripping. Even they seem jubilant over anticipated victory.

Everywhere among the carvings of Angkor one meets the graceful figures of the Tevadas or sacred dancers. Coming into a court where they abound is like being shown into a room of living strangers. They give the illusion of being sentient, as real as the present-day girls of the neighbouring villages, but far more lovely. They have the ease of those to whom self-consciousness is unknown, the air of the real aristocrat. But best of all, they have unvarying happy dispositions. They stand in groups with arms affectionately interlaced ; or singly,

holding a flower or the end of a strangely draped sampot. Gauze and silk clothe them, and the sun has taught them to be half-naked yet unashamed. Jewels adorn them and head-dresses create wonder.

On the walls of the Bayon, grandest and oldest of the monuments within the royal city's walls, are thousands of feet of chiselled pictures forming a wonderfully illuminating book on the life of the ancient Khmers. Crude but strong, these pictures tell us of the life of the common people.

The fact of such life being depicted on a temple wall indicates most strikingly the importance to the church of the lower classes. Angkor Thom's ancient population is estimated at a million. A large half of these, at least, must have been slaves and artisans, to judge by the stupendous constructions the Khmers left behind them. The army would have accounted for many more. Both these classes are lavishly depicted in this temple of a warlike and artistic race.

Here is a relief showing a cock-fight in progress, the eager spectators crowding round the kneeling pair who hold their spirited birds ready to fly at one another on the instant. Above are galleys full of soldiers, rowed by a line of oarsmen each working his spatulate blade with precision, while fish in the lake flee from the dangerous ship, only to meet death in the jaws of a lurking crocodile. Here are barques and barges in which lovely ladies float upon shaded rivers, cushioned under broidered awnings in an elegance which even Cleopatra can hardly have surpassed.

It is discovered through these carvings that the chariots and harnessings of these people were of bronze ornamented with carvings and jewels ; that exquisite litters were constructed for the portage of ladies of high

caste ; that the King's howdah was the acme of ornamentation. At first glance the costume of the ancient Khmers appears sketchy, a skirt at most, a twist of rope, or a floating scarf-end. But closer examination reveals that what appears to be a twist or stiff tab is the elegant silk sampot, or sarong, heavy with gold thread and ingeniously draped.

Life, as lived in those royal courts, must have been good ; idling upon the limpid waters of the lake, feasting in the great chambers of the palace, or reclining at ease, entertained by the graceful and sinuous dances of the Tevadas. Even the slaves and common people, hard as doubtless was their lot, had their sports to distract their minds from the ache of overworked muscles, the smart of blows.

But all that was centuries ago. Where to-day in the jungles of Cambodia is the love of luxury and its appurtenances, the charming indulgence of the sybarite? Where are the golden pleasure-boats, the curtained palanquins and the lovely, perfumed ladies they bore ; the elephants, jewels, prancing stallions and droning priests? The jungle covers them all, any that were left when that mighty race met its end. No written word, no carven monument—save what is left of their own dwellings and temples—remains to perpetuate their memory. Even such memorial to them as has remained, lay forgotten of men for generations.

A race arose from obscurity ; it built the most marvellous edifices of Asia ; it was subjugated and disappeared ; its gift to the world was smothered under the jungle ; the buildings and the people were forgot. That, in brief, is as much of the story as we know. *Sic transit gloria mundi !*

To-day some five hundred native labourers, under

the direction of the French, are toiling continually at Angkor at the task of excavating lost stones and restoring fallen monoliths. Archæologists are slowly deciphering the few writings in Khmer and Sanskrit which remain, and puzzling out the stories depicted in the bas-reliefs. Some day, it is hoped, this mystery of the Cambodian jungle will be cleared up and the truth about the identity and eventual fate of this vanished race will be revealed by the piecing together of accumulated evidence. But for the present there is little but theory to add to such evidence as I have already offered you.

Without doubt one of the most interesting theories so far advanced as the solution to this age-old enigma is the belief that the Khmers were colonists from a continent situated in mid-Pacific, a continent which, before the dawn of history, was rent asunder by earthquake and swallowed up by the inrushing ocean. Such a claim certainly sounds fantastic enough, but the evidence brought forth in its support is not only extraordinarily fascinating but, taking into consideration what has been said in a previous chapter on the great break-up of the earth's original mainland, is singularly impressive into the bargain.

For many years certain prehistoric remains on some of the South Sea Islands, vestiges of old stone temples and other lithic fragments, have mystified archæologists and historians. These are obviously relics of a great civilisation. There are great stone temples, cyclopean stone walls, stone-lined canals, stone-paved roads, immense monoliths and statuary, and even piles of cut and dressed building-stone, obviously still awaiting the shipment intended for it no one knows how many thousands of years ago.

Yet now we find these remains, not on a great con-

tinent, but on mere specks of land in the midst of a vast ocean, inhabited by savages and semi-savages. Moreover, many of the islands which show such remains contain throughout their length and breadth no other particle of such stone as these relics are built of.

How came such remarkable engineering feats upon these barbarous and remote islands, unless the islands were once part of (i.e. the mountain peaks of) a vanished continental land-mass ?

Working on this exciting theory, Mr. James Churchward, a well-known archæologist, discovered in the archives of an Indian college temple, ancient documents of the utmost interest. This discovery consisted of a collection of long-forgotten Naacal tablets of baked clay, which, together with ancient records from other countries, tell of a strange land of 64,000,000 inhabitants who, some 50,000 years ago, had developed a civilisation superior in many respects to our own.

This country, according to the interpretation of these antique writings, was situated to the *west* of America and to the *east* of Asia, was disintegrated by terrible earthquakes, and disappeared for ever beneath the ocean, about 12,000 years ago. The name of this mysterious land was called Mu.

Now if any such continent had existed between Asia and America, as described in these records, it must have lain in what is now the Pacific Ocean, roughly in that area where now we find the islands of Easter, Mangaia, Tonga-Tabu, Panape, and the Ladrone or Marianna Islands ; and it is on these very islands, and on others in their vicinity, that mysterious prehistoric remains are to be found, corresponding in every respect to descriptions in the records supposed to relate to the Land of Mu.

Furthermore, at Uxmal, in Yucatan, a ruined temple bears inscriptions commemorative of the " Lands of the West, whence we came " ; and the striking Mexican pyramid south-west of Mexico City, according to its inscriptions, was raised as a monument to the destruction of these same Lands of the West. The inscriptions on both these relics of a forgotten past are in the same sign-language as that of the Naacal tablets relating to Mu.

The universality of certain peculiar old symbols and customs—conforming to the symbols and customs mentioned in the Naacal tablets of India—observed in countries as far apart as Egypt, Burma, India, Japan, China, the South Sea Islands, Central America, and among some of the North American Indian tribes, would seem to offer strong evidence that the peoples of these countries came originally from a common source —a source unidentifiable save as some ancient land now vanished from the face of the earth.

Moreover, in addition to the Naacal tablets, ancient records of many lands contain references to the existence of the mysterious land of Mu. The " Lands of the West " are mentioned, and described, in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, written by the sage and historian, Valmiki, the dictation of Narana, the high priest of the Rishi from temple at Ayhodia ; in the Troano MS., now in the British Museum ; in an ancient Maya book, written in Yucatan ; in the Codex Cortesianus ; in another Maya book of about the same age as the Troano MS. ; in the Lhasa Record ; and in hundreds of others from Egypt, Greece, Central America and Mexico.

Here, in brief, is the picture of the lost land of Mu, which may be reconstructed from these extremely varied sources. At the height of its prosperity Mu was a

beautiful tropical country, teeming with gay and brilliant life, over which 64,000,000 human beings reigned supreme. This population was made up of ten tribes or peoples, each distinct from the other, but all under one government, the king of all being called Ra Mu.

The dominant race of Mu was a white race, exceedingly handsome people with clear white or olive skins, large, soft, dark eyes, and straight black hair. Besides this white race there were other races, people with yellow, black or brown skins ; but these never predominated. These ancient inhabitants of Mu were great navigators and sailors, who took their ships over the world " from the eastern to the western oceans and from the northern to the southern seas." They were also learned architects, building great temples and palaces of stone. They carved and set up great monoliths as monuments.

Many cities were built at or near the mouths of the great rivers, these being seats of trade and commerce, whence ships passed to and from all parts of the world. For the Land of Mu was the mother and centre of the earth's civilisations, learning, trade, and commerce, and all other countries throughout the world were her colonies or colonial empires.

The wealthy classes adorned themselves with fine raiment, with many jewels and precious stones. They lived in imposing palaces attended by many servants. On cool evenings might be seen pleasure-ships, filled with gorgeously-dressed men and women, bedecked with jewels. The long sweeps with which these ships were propelled gave a musical rhythm to the song and laughter of the happy passengers.

When this ancient land was at the height of its

greatness and prosperity, and after a preliminary volcanic visitation, a terrible fate descended upon Mu. "The whole continent heaved and rolled like the ocean's waves"; mighty buildings crashed into heaps of smoking rubble; the air was filled with shrieks of human agony and despair; and the cities of Mu lay everywhere in ruins. With the splitting of the earth's surface the fires beneath burst forth, piercing the clouds in roaring flames "three miles in diameter." A black pall of smoke, stabbed with flickering lightning shafts, hung over the land.

Huge cataclysmic waves rolled in over the shores of the doomed continent, extending themselves over the plains. Cities and all things living went down to destruction before them; and when night fell, Mu was torn asunder. With thunderous roarings she sank down into a "tank of fire." Mu and her 64,000,000 people were sacrificed, and as she sank into the fiery gulf, another force claimed her—50,000,000 square miles of water, which rushed roaring and boiling in, to cover her from mortal eyes for ever.

These details seem to be confirmed in all records relating to Mu, records made by the world-wide colonists of the engulfed Mother Country, the country of which all that now was left was those few scattered mountain peaks, with their traces of vanished splendour, which are known to-day as the South Sea Islands.

That, very briefly, is the story of Mu, the forgotten, pieced together from innumerable more or less fragmentary sources, to make what is still an extremely incomplete picture. I have touched upon it here because it seems to present a possible and an extremely interesting solution to the mystery of the identity of the builders of Angkor Thom.



By courtesy of O F T

A NAGA ON THE TEMPLE AT ANGKOR



CARVINGS ON THE TEMPLE AT ANGKOR

In the first place, the Naacal tablets and Valmiki both state that the first settlers in Burma came from a land " one moon's journey towards the rising sun." And one moon's journey to the east from the coast of Burma brings a traveller in a canoe to the Caroline Islands, which group contains some of the most astonishing prehistoric remains in the Pacific, remains which, according to all the data, unquestionably identify themselves as part of the inferred continent of Mu. That is the first indication of the possible origin of the builders of Angkor.

It is noticeable also that the conventional beasts, called by archæologists " lions "—though Indo-China has no lions on which these stone figures could have been modelled—which are so prominent among the carvings of Angkor, all stand with their faces towards the east, the direction of the burial-ground of Mu.

That these beasts are symbolical, and symbolical of Mu, affirms Churchward, who has devoted many years to the study of that vanished land, is shown by the conventional shape of their mouths, which form an elongated square, one of the forms of the letter M in the hieratic alphabet of Mu, and one of her symbols. If this deduction is correct, then from end to end of Angkor one meets the constant cry from these stones : " Mu, Mu, the Motherland ! "

The people of Mu, as described in the ancient documents already mentioned, " adorned in fine raiment with many jewels and precious stones," living in " imposing palaces attended by many servants," and taking their ease in " pleasure ships " on the placid waters of river and lake, certainly seem to bear a strong resemblance to the splendid beings who, as has been seen, lived,

loved, and laboured among the courts and palaces of Angkor Thom.

But the strongest piece of evidence of all is offered by the Seven-headed Serpent which predominates overwhelmingly over all the ancient symbols of Angkor. This serpent appears everywhere among the ruins, but the principal representation is at the approach to the Temple of the Vat. On either side of this approach are carved gigantic Seven-headed Serpents, their branching heads upraised from eight to ten feet, their undulating tails ending at the temple walls.

Now the Seven-headed Serpent is the most interesting of all mystical symbols. It permeates all ancient writings under different names, because it symbolises the Creator and Creation ; and the Naacal tablets make it plain that, as the symbol of Creation, the Seven-headed Serpent was also the symbol of Mu the Motherland.

It also seems significant that in front of the necks of the Nagas (the Cambodian name for the Seven-headed Serpent) are delicately carved designs which tally exactly with the various other symbols of Mu given in the Naacal tablets—the lotus flower, the sun, and the number three, which is the symbolical numeral of Mu. The very name Naga bears a striking resemblance to that of the Naacals, who, it seems, originally came from the land of Mu, and were teachers of the sacred doctrine to the colonists from the Mother Country.

That is one of the theories ingeniously propounded to account for the origin of Angkor, and if there is anything in it, it would certainly explain a great deal that seems otherwise inexplicable about these mysterious ruins hidden in the heart of the Cambodian jungle.

There is no reason why the overseas colonies of Mu should not have continued to exist for a very considerable

time after the destruction of their Motherland, even though, without her influence behind them, they did all eventually dwindle and perish. It seems at least possible that the unknown Khmers may have been the last survivors of one such colonial empire, that Angkor Thom marks the final stand made by the Asiatic descendants of colonists who originally came from Mu.

If this was the case, no one of those who inhabited the royal city in recorded times is likely to have had any inkling of his own fantastic descent ; all memory of the origin must long have disappeared from the minds of the Khmers, lost in the dim mists of time. The mysteries of their original worship also would doubtless have by then become as meaninglessly formal, as overlaid and confused with subsequent grafts and importations from a dozen later sources, as is the religion expounded to-day in Christian and other churches.

To the last inhabitants of Angkor, the symbolical creatures eternally crying " Mu, Mu ! " about its streets from their stone mouths, would no doubt have been regarded as formalised representations of the indigenous tiger of the Burmese forests (as, indeed, many archæologists regard them to-day). Even the priests would have come to regard the great seven-headed Naga as some fantastic conception of their " barbarous "—and probably snake-worshipping—ancestors, while they themselves worshipped the god Vishnu and other importations from India, China, and the Peninsula.

Possibly it *was* thus with the unknown Khmers, as the assertions of various theorists indicate, though even this theory goes no way towards explaining the mystery of the race's complete ultimate disappearance from mortal ken. Possibly, though the writer does not think so, those who contend that the race was formed of an

accretion of pioneer adventurers and immigrants from many sources—as the race now in possession of North America has been formed—are correct. The truth is the secret of Angkor, a secret which it may well be that we shall never discover.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WANDERING LAKE OF THE GOBI

VAST, mysterious Central Asia has guarded its many secrets longer and more successfully than any country in the world. Shrouded in mist and enigmatic to the last, its horizons conceal innumerable mysteries, grim for the most part, but all of absorbing interest.

For the explorer these regions, barred from the prying eyes of the outer world by inhospitable deserts and almost insurmountable mountains, dizzy distances must be conquered by the slow, sure tread of camels or of the incongruous yak. From Peking in the east to the Caspian Sea in the west, this mystery-shrouded land extends for 3000 miles; from north to south it measures some 1200 miles.

Wherever the traveller turns his steps in this vast realm of desert and mountain, he meets with evidence of its marvellous past; everywhere on the aged, wrinkled earth it has left its traces—traces, many of them, which have provided fascinating mysteries to intrigue the minds of modern men. Here we are treading everywhere on classic ground. People and tribes of many races and origins have succeeded one another as rulers over kingdoms which have been founded, have flourished, have fallen, and have been obliterated.

Here influences from China, India, Greece, Persia, and the mist-wrapped country of the Scythians have left

their mark upon the arts. Hence migrations have set forth ; here barbarian hordes have warred against one another ; captains have led their hosts through these wastes to force the countries of the West into allegiance to the Son of Heaven.

Here conquered races and fleeing armies have dropped from thirst and left their dead behind them. By their caravans merchants, pilgrims, couriers and travellers with deathless names have maintained the connection between East and West across these frowning lands. And vast as is this territory, it forms only a part of the enormous kingdom whose peoples and races, seven hundred years ago, obeyed the slightest whim of the world conqueror, Chingis Khan.

North of Tibet lies one of the greatest remaining enigmas of the East—that home of howling storms and oppressive silences, the Gobi Desert. The life of man, animals, and vegetables, as it appears in traversing this dreary waste and its adjacent mountains, embraces only a second in eternity. They are transient visitors upon the face of the earth, a picture of impermanence. But they are nevertheless descendants of high ancestry, and their roots disappear in a far-distant past.

The most ancient known remains of primitive man were found in the neighbourhood of Peking, *Sinanthropus Pekinensis*, whose antiquity is estimated to be at least half a million years, and at most a million years. Anthropologists believe that, if ever future investigators succeed in finding the remains of man's forefathers who walked the earth several million years ago, it may well be somewhere amid these barren and inhospitable wastes that the discovery is made.

Should this prophecy ever be fulfilled, the Gobi Desert will have yielded up the solution to what is

perhaps the greatest mystery of all time—the origin of man. Already archæologists have found tools and instruments of *Sinanthropus's* descendants—the Neolithic, or later Stone Age men—who inhabited the Gobi five thousand years ago, which can be counted in tens of thousands.

Yes, the pale clay of the Gobi Desert conceals many secrets, offers ever-fresh mysteries and incomprehensibilities to archæologist and explorer alike. Not the least extraordinary of these mysteries is the fate of the vanished country of Lop-nor, victim of the vagaries of a perambulating lake.

In the north-east corner of that part of the Gobi known as the Lop Desert, lies the desolate and barren piece of country known by those who dwell in those parts as Lop-nor. Ancient Chinese maps showed a lake of considerable size lying in the eastern extension of the river Tarim, which flows directly east through this area. European surveyors, however, were unable to discover either a lake or a river here, and for many years the question of the existence or non-existence of the lake of Lop-nor remained a mystery.

Then the Russian General Prjevalsky, on his notable journey of 1876-77, discovered a large lake, which was unhesitatingly identified with that of the Chinese, lying a geographical degree south of the place allotted to it on the Chinese maps. Prjevalsky also found that the Tarim's lowest reach turned off to the south-east and south of the lake.

The next explorer of the district, the German geographer Baron von Richtofen, finally produced evidence that the Tarim had changed its course, that the northern Chinese lake had dried up, and that Prjevalsky's lake was a new formation.

Nothing very mysterious in the drying up of a lake in East Turkestan, where rivers are constantly silting up and changing their courses, you may say. But a further revelation was to come.

The early Chinese maps had shown quite a considerable city on the north shore of their original lake, and it was known that an ancient highway, called by the inhabitants of Lop " the road where coal was spread," ran past this spot from Sachow to Korla, passing through Ying-pen. Old folk of the Lop-men still preserve the tradition that the great highway to Peking on the longest caravan route on earth, the Silk Route which carried to the polite world and the Imperial Court of Rome the noble silk sung by Virgil—ran through Ying-pen and so on to Dung-khan or Sachow. Certainly a road of some kind is still faintly marked through this district by *toras*, or " road pyramids " of baked clay.

Marco Polo, incomparable as a geographer among medieval travellers, mentions this lakeside city of the Chinese. But " Lop is a great city on the edge of the desert which is called the Lop Desert, and is situated between east and north-east. It belongs to the Great Khan, and the people worship Mohammed," with the comment that travellers stopped there to replenish their supplies of food, water, and baggage animals before pushing on across the desert, is all the description he gives of it.

Who were these ancient lake dwellers, citizens of " no mean city," if Marco Polo and the Chinese before him were to be believed ? What was the manner of their lives and of their passing ? Neither Prjevalsky nor Richtofen found any trace of them or of their vanished city. The desert had swallowed them up and they were gone.

It was in 1899 that Dr. Sven Hedin, the distinguished

Swedish explorer of unknown Asia, visited the Lop Desert in an attempt to wrest from the stubborn clay the secret of its vanished race of men. He followed the dry original course of the Tarim to survey the bed of the first lake of Lop-nor, the ancient water-course known to all the native hunters who were acquainted with it as *Kurruk-daria*, or the "Dry River," though they also sometimes called it the *Kum-daria*, or the "Sand River."

The only inhabitants of this seemingly endless waste of wind-sculptured clay were occasional Mongol nomads, hunting the wild camel or the rare deer, and endlessly seeking pasturage for their herds of camels, sheep and goats. Eastward from the ruins of the deserted town of Ying-pen the *Kurruk-daria* contained not a drop of moisture. All the way from Ying-pen until it entered the desiccated basin of the vanished lake of Lop-nor it was as dry as tinder.

Sven Hedin found conclusive evidence of former luxuriant vegetation, however, as he followed this husk of what had once been a noble river. Along its banks lay all that remained of splendid forests, many of the dead trunks prone upon the desert clay, with others still standing gauntly on their own roots, like the embalmed mummies of the forest giants they once had been, giving the country the appearance of a stubble-field of Brobdingnagian proportions.

Other evidence of the vanished fertility of the river's banks, and of the fact that they had once been irrigated, was offered by the presence of occasional dying *viggdeh* bushes (*Elæagnus hortensis*). For of all trees and bushes these are invariably the first to succumb after irrigation ceases, and they wither as soon as the water turns salt. Poplar and tamarisks are far more tenacious of life, and

will continue to survive for a considerable time on their own roots.

As the Swedish explorer and his little party pushed on, the river-bed began to be covered with enormous quantities of aquatic snail-shells, proving that the river was formerly accompanied by marginal lakes. For fresh-water molluscs do not frequent swift-running water, but only tranquil lakes and lagoons where there is an abundance of vegetation.

"On the 28th we travelled 13½ miles, going to the south-west," runs Dr. Hedin's own account of his journey of discovery. "During the course of the day the lake basin assumed a different aspect. The snail-shells became more numerous, and amongst them were thin patches of sand not exceeding one foot in thickness, and dead forest again made its appearance at pretty frequent intervals. There were now only two levels in the clay deposits, indicating different periods and different water-levels of the former lake. As the wind eats its way into the clay the snail-shells drop lower and lower, until the ground becomes in places quite white with them.

"We picked up a small iron cup, and fragments of clay pottery were so common that we ceased to pay any heed to them. A belt of dead forest which stretched in two directions, 60 degrees east of south and 60 degrees west of south, marked an important piece of the ancient shore-line of Lop-nor, showing as it did that the lake long remained stationary there.

"Thus we went on between the ridges of clay, with the water drip-dripping in an alarming manner from out *tagars* of ice. About three o'clock in the afternoon Ordek and Chernoff, who were leading the way on foot, seeking out the easiest path to travel by, suddenly stopped

and shouted back that they had come to the ruins of two or three houses. The water-course we were following had brought us straight to this remarkable discovery. Had we been travelling two or three hundred yards either to east or west we should never have seen them. Indeed, so close was the resemblance they bore to the ordinary dead forest that it was only a near inspection which revealed what they actually were, namely, human dwellings on the northern shore of Lop-nor.

"We of course stopped and encamped at once, and I began a hurried survey of the locality. There had originally been three houses, but their immense beams and posts, their roof and boarden walls had all fallen in: the timber was greatly decayed through time and the effects of desert storms, and were, moreover, partly buried in the sand. The only portion of the structure which remained in position were the beams of the basement, and from these I was easily able to draw up a plan of the houses and measure their dimensions."

After a silence of some fifteen centuries the Gobi had yielded up the first tangible traces of this forgotten section of its ancient inhabitants. The people of Lop had actually existed, and they had dwelt on the spot assigned to them by the Chinese historians of old. Hedin had proved the bare facts; but, with only these few mouldering pieces of timber to go upon, the secret of whom and what these people had been seemed as far from solution as ever.

There was only one circumstance which pointed to the fact of these ruinous dwellings—discovered by such a stroke of fortune—being of great antiquity, namely, the fact that they stood on mounds or ridges of clay, over eight feet high, which had precisely the same outline and area as the plan of the house. Originally the houses

were no doubt built upon the level ground, but after the surface dried, with the disappearance of the lake, it had been scooped out and blown away by the wind, leaving behind only these portions on which the house actually stood.

That was the first piece of evidence, relating to the period at which the lake-city of Lop-nor had been inhabited, which the desert yielded to this later day explorer of the lake. But various discoveries during this and a second visit in the following year were to yield many other interesting clues as to the nature and habits of these departed people and their country.

Before their displacement by the drying up of the lake, their means of subsistence, the art of these people, whoever they may have been, had evidently reached a high state of development, for Hedin unearthed many remarkable wood-carvings, including a picture of a soldier with a helmet on his head and a trident in his hand, and another man with a chaplet. Other designs consisted of pattern devices and scroll work, lattice-work and lotus flowers, all cut with considerable artistic sense.

Figures of the Buddha frequently appeared, and a particularly significant design of a fish surrounded by leaves and scroll-work. Now the artists would never have thought of using such a poor decorative object as a fish, unless it had been a creature of particular importance in that locality, and, we may also say, unless it had constituted one of the most important items in the diet of the inhabitants. Otherwise it would have been contrary to all rhyme and reason to combine fish instead of birds with leaves and garlands.

Even if there existed no other incontrovertible proofs that this ancient town formerly stood on the shores of a

lake, we should be quite justified in inferring the fact from the use of a fish as a decorative device in the carvings of the people. Taking the country as it was when Hedin visited it, a fish would be the very last creature one would think of in such a connection.

Another important find was the discovery of what had obviously once been a temple. The remains were unmistakable from the fragments of cups for offerings, as well as from the carvings. The great number of wood-carvings, small as well as great, which were excavated, proved that this little temple, with its tasteful and minute ornamentation, must have been a perfect gem of artistic construction.

It is easy to imagine how beautiful a spot this must have been—the temple, with its elegant façade, which was probably painted as well as adorned with carvings, embowered among shady poplar groves, with an arm of the lake touching it, and the green or yellow seed-beds spread all round it, except where they were interrupted by patches of cultivated ground, irrigated by the winding canals. Round about it were the scattered villages, their clay towers peeping over the tops of the woods, high enough to show their signal-fires when war or other danger threatened, but in times of peace marking the great highway which passed near this sacred spot.

Southwards stretched far and wide the bluish-green waters of Lop-nor, set about with forest groves, and bordered with immense expanses of reeds and sedge, swarming with fish, wild duck, and wild geese. The background of the picture to the west would be, then as now, in clear weather, the Kunruk-tagh, where the people were in touch with springs and oases, and across which a road undoubtedly ran to Turfen.

It is plain to pilgrims of a later age that this region was once more beautiful than any now existing in East Turkestan. For at the present day one could nowhere find in that part of Asia houses decorated with such tasteful and artistic feeling as were these. And it requires no great effort of the imagination to conceive how effectively the dense masses of foliage would have shown up the architecture.

Look upon that picture and then consider the picture of the scene as it appeared to the eyes of Dr. Sven Hedin. An endless array of cenotaphs. Not a single leaf; not a single desert spider. There was then only one power which brought sound and movement into those dreary lifeless wastes—the eternal wind. And all this almost incredible change simply because a river, the Tarim, had changed its course to empty itself into new lakes farther to the south.

The ancient lake would have seemed to have dried up very quickly, perhaps in the course of a few years. The forest and reeds, of course, would have subsisted for a considerable time upon the moisture absorbed by the ground, but afterwards they gradually withered away, until at last this once beautiful country resembled a cemetery, the inscriptions on its tombstones alone perpetuating the memory of its former life and colour.

Dr. Hedin had indeed uncovered a mystery from the arid clay of the Gobi Desert. Who were these mysterious people who had been wiped off the face of the earth—these people whom history had long forgotten, whose fate had perhaps never been recorded in any annals? What name did their country bear? What became of them when the lake which gave them life ceased to exist.

From certain scraps of paper and inscribed pieces of

wood which the excavators unearthed from what had obviously been originally a rubbish-heap, and also from ancient Chinese sources, scholars now know the following facts about this vanished land and its people, facts which show that, despite the completeness and finality of its passing, Lou-Lan, as we now know it to have been called formerly, was once a country of considerable importance in the affairs of Central Asia.

The data and other indications of date in the MSS. found by Hedin point to the period between the middle of the third and the beginning of the fourth century A.D., but the lake was known to the Chinese long before the Mongol era. The people were Mongols, using the Chinese speech and currency, living largely as fishermen, but practising also the arts of agriculture and war. The mention of "armies," "forty officials," and "numerous farms" suggest that Lou-Lan was thickly inhabited during the height of its prosperity.

There is sufficient evidence also, in ancient Chinese records, to show that Lou-Lan was the name of a country which, by reason of its situation between the great northern highway and the great southern highway from China to Europe, played, in spite of its small size, a very important part in the wars between the Chinese emperors of the Han dynasty and the Hiung-nu (Turks or Huns) in the second century before our era, in that it acted as a kind of buffer state between those powers.

The city of Lou-Lan would seem to have been destroyed by a desert storm or by an inundation, or by both, in the beginning of the fourth century. The people would then seem to have built another town, the so-called Dragon Town, which in its turn was destroyed by a storm and flood in 1308–11.

Of the ultimate fate of the survivors and the eventual

drying up, or rather departure of the lake of Lop-nor to a northern point of this desert—for it is now known as a result of Hedin's investigations that the lake actually flowed from its silted-up bed into lower levels scooped out by the wind to the north—nothing further is known. It is interesting to note, however, that this wayward lake, through the reverse action of the elements, at length started wandering back to its original site, and by 1921 actually occupied its first basin once more, bringing with it much of the life which formerly occurred there.

The vanished people of old Lou-Lan will not return, however. Like a " wind on the waste," the hands which raised that elegant temple to the glory of Buddha, which dug the canals, tilled the fertile fields and fished the equally fertile waters of the lake, are gone from the scene for ever. Where they went and the manner of their going are secrets locked for ever in the grim annals of the Gobi Desert.

CHAPTER XIV

CONJURING IN EASTERN LANDS

EVERYONE knows at least something of the mysteries of Asiatic conjuring. A great number of people appear to have met someone who knew a man in India who had seen the famous rope trick performed—though it is surprising how rare it is to obtain first-hand information on this subject.

Many people, in fact, will tell you that this trick has never been performed. There have, however, been many performances too well authenticated to be doubted. The particular performance of which I have personal knowledge took place before an audience of Europeans on the lawn of an Indian staff officer's house near Simla. The officer himself, stationed at an overlooking window, took photographs of the whole performance.

When the negatives were developed they revealed no sign of either rope or boy climbing it. All that appeared was the audience in a semicircle, facing the performer, and his boy squatting side by side in front of them, all gazing intently upwards. The last picture, however, showed the boy stealing quietly away, to reappear presently from another direction.

The evidence in this case seems to afford conclusive confirmation of the most generally accepted explanation of this trick—that of mass hypnotism and ventriloquism. But the fact remains that the camera itself can sometimes

be " hypnotised " by Oriental " magic." I have been told that there is in existence an actual photograph of the rope trick, showing the rope running straight out of sight into the air with the boy half-way up it. But for this I cannot vouch.

There is, however, an authenticated case of an official of the Indian political service who once desired to photograph a certain group of natives. One of these strongly objected to posing for this purpose—an objection common among many natives, who believe that the action of taking a photograph will result in imprisoning the sitter's soul in the camera. But eventually, after much persuasion, the man consented to stand in the group. " But," he said, " you cannot photograph me, sahib."

When the plate was developed the group came out perfectly—but there was a blank space where the objector had stood.

Straightforward conjuring or sleight of hand is all that is witnessed by most visitors to the East. The genuine mystics never perform for money ; they seldom demonstrate their powers in public at all, save occasionally on very special occasions, such as an Emperor's Durbar, to draw attention to their particular school of philosophy.

Many of the tricks, therefore, which are performed for the edification of the tourist in the East can be seen equally well done in Maskelyne's famous Theatre of Mysteries at home ; and the main interest in Oriental magic lies in its extremely profound philosophical interest.

This aspect of Asiatic magic, however, is too abstruse to be approached here—it is a matter of many years of rigorous self-discipline, study and asceticism before

an initiate becomes even a " pupil " in these mysteries—but much even of the so-called plain conjuring to be found throughout the East remains entirely inexplicable to the Western mind.

One of the most famous of all Indian jugglers was Ram Pershad, known all over Southern India some thirty years ago. This man would give a member of his audience a rupee to hold, and standing some fifteen feet away, would request the recipient of the coin to think of any country which should come into his mind.

" What country did you think of, sahib ? " the juggler would ask after a moment.

" America," he might be told—or perhaps, " Holland."

" And now what have you in your hand ? " would come the next question, and on examination the rupee, which had been held tightly in the spectator's hand all the time, would mysteriously have become in the first case an American dollar, in the second case a gulden.

The coin, which on being returned to Ram Pershad invariably became a rupee again, was in turn handed to any member of the audience who cared to make the experiment, and unfailingly became a coin of whatever country the holder chose to think.

Another favourite trick of this remarkable man was to place his two hands, covered with a cloth, against the wall of whatever building he was performing in—he would perform in any European bungalow to which he was invited. After a moment he would remove both hands and cloth, and there, from the bare wall of the bungalow, would protrude a little silver tap.

" Now, sahibs," he would announce, " allow me to draw you a drink. Please to name any beverage you would care for, and it is yours for the asking." Nor

was he ever known to fail. Port, sherry, champagne, beer, all poured obediently in turn from Ram Pershad's mysterious tap. He is reported to have filled a glass half full of excellent whisky, and the next instant to have brimmed it with sparkling soda-water.

Three coins held in a spectator's hand would be changed in a moment by this juggler, standing at a distance which appeared to make trickery out of the question, into a small, wriggling snake ; while another of his most remarkable achievements was to produce from an empty bag laid flat on the floor more assorted vegetables and fruit than any one man could possibly carry. These miraculous productions were invariably handed round for inspection by the audience, samples often having been eaten by spectators. Yet one by one they were then returned to the bag and made to disappear, the empty bag being eventually handed round also for inspection.

In attempting to explain such performances as these, no one has yet got further than the old theory of mass hypnotism cum thought-reading—which, to the writer at least, seems far from convincing.

Yet another unexplained mystery of Asiatic conjuring is the act of levitation, which it is established beyond question is performed in many parts of India, in Tibet, and in the Malay Peninsula.

A few years ago an Englishman attached to the Indian Civil Service, and then stationed near Lucknow, sent home the following account, accompanied by an excellent photograph, of a demonstration of levitation witnessed by him and some brother officials.

It was in the Upper Provinces at the beginning of the cold weather, ran the Englishman's account, and in common with most civilians whose duties did not confine

them to headquarters, he was in camp. One day he received a visit from a native gentleman of his acquaintance, who lived in the neighbourhood, and who happened to mention that he had lately witnessed a very remarkable performance by a travelling juggler. The performer had mesmerized a boy and caused him to remain in the air some four feet from the ground, without support of any kind.

Having read accounts of similar performances, such as the rope trick, but never having met anyone who had actually seen one of these, the Englishman at once expressed a desire to see this performance for himself.

A few days later his Indian friend arrived at the camp, bringing with him the juggler in question, a Brahmin perhaps a little under forty years of age, who proceeded to rig up, a few yards from the narrator's tent, a little enclosure about twelve feet square, with tent walls on three sides. On the fourth side, facing where the spectators sat at a distance of about fifteen feet, was a curtain which the performer could draw backwards and forwards at will.

The Brahmin had with him a boy, probably twelve or thirteen years old, who, the man told his audience, was also a Brahmin, but no relation of his own.

The performance began with the fakir mesmerising the boy, a process which took only a few minutes. As soon as the lad had gone into what looked like a dead faint, the man laid him flat on a box standing just inside the curtain, covered him with a cloth, and drew the curtain across. And that was the end of the first scene.

After three or four minutes the curtain was drawn back again, and the second scene opened. The audience then saw the boy sitting cross-legged on a sort of cushion made of a pile of coarse cloth. This cushion rested on a

tripod of three stout sticks crossed and tied together. The boy had his arms extended, with his hands resting palms downwards on the tops of two longer sticks which stood upright—but not embedded in the ground at all—one on each side of him.

The boy's head and shoulders were covered with a black cloth, which the fakir occasionally threw back for a short time, revealing the lad's face and chest.

Next, the performer took away, one by one, the three sticks forming the tripod, leaving the boy squatting cross-legged in the air on his cushion, with nothing underneath him, but with outstretched hands still resting on the side sticks, some six feet high.

Watching breathlessly, the spectators saw the fakir remove one side stick, folding the free arm across the lad's chest, and leaving him suspended in mid-air with one hand stretched out sideways, resting on top of the remaining stick. This was decidedly startling. For with nothing but air beneath him, the boy should have fallen to the ground like a stone.

Permission was sought of the Brahmin to come up close, the Englishman having been sitting up to this time about fifteen feet from the curtain and about twenty feet from the boy.

" Come as close as you like," he was told, " but do not touch the boy."

Walking up, accompanied by several other spectators, to within six inches of the boy, the Englishman walked below, behind and all round him, and also felt about with his walking-stick to see if he could detect any wire or support of any kind. He could, however, find nothing whatsoever. But the boy was there right enough, and no dummy. His face and chest were exposed, and the regular movement of his breathing was plainly visible.

Then, after the audience had been standing round the miraculously suspended figure for some minutes, searching in vain for trickery, the boy remaining motionless in the air all the time, in the attitude described, they returned to their seats. The Brahmin, it may be noted, had not said that they had been there long enough, or asked his audience to take their places again and let the performance proceed.

After the spectators had regained their seats the climax of the performance took place. The fakir removed the remaining stick, and folded that arm, too, across the boy's chest, with absolutely nothing below, above, or behind him to keep him in that position.

The Brahmin stood some four or five feet away from the boy for a few seconds, and then pulled the curtain across, hiding him from view. That ended scene two, and practically the whole of the performance.

When the curtain was pulled back for the third time the boy was seen lying flat on the box previously mentioned, and the Brahmin proceeded to " de-mesmerise " him. After a minute or two the lad sat up, rubbed his eyes, and stared about him. The whole performance, from beginning to end, took about twenty to twenty-five minutes.

By nature sceptical about such performances, and annoyed that he had failed to detect how the trick was done, the narrator arranged another performance at his own house, when he returned to headquarters ; and one day the Brahmin repeated the same trick before a different party of friends, one of whom obtained a photograph of the boy suspended in the air without visible support of any kind. Later he even repeated the performance a third time in similar circumstances.

I have also a record of this amazing feat as per-

formed in Java, and the manner of its performance was perhaps even more extraordinary than that of the Indian exponent.

The wife of a District Magistrate stationed at Samarang was giving a party, when a Malay appeared who offered to give a demonstration of levitation to amuse the guests. On receiving permission to do so, the man requested the party to seat themselves in a circle on the ground, and then proceeded to cause a small boy whom he had with him to float through the air in a horizontal position above their heads.

The lad, lying rigid on his back, as a bather floats on the water, passed several times back and forth over the heads of the astonished spectators.

As to the question of the genuineness or otherwise of Oriental magicians there has been much argument "about it and about." It is a fascinating subject, and one that is likely to be debated for many years to come. Without taking sides in this question—though I have my own opinion on the matter—here is a true story of a "Doubting Thomas" who was cured of his suspicions in an extremely dramatic manner. The tale comes from a man who was for many years a member of the original Civil Club of Coimbatore, in Southern India, and who was an eye-witness of the affair.

Conversation in the Club had turned one day on the performances of native fakirs, and one man, a doctor who had spent the best part of his sixty years in India, asserted that, while no doubt there existed numerous so-called fakirs who were no more than ingenious frauds, there were unquestionably natives possessed of quite extraordinary occult powers.

At this, two particularly sceptical young members gave it as their opinion that seeing was believing, and

expressed a desire for a practical demonstration before they would be prepared to accept such powers as genuine.

Some weeks later, a demonstration was actually arranged by the doctor to take place at the club. Unlike the usual type of scarred and emaciated fakir-beggars, the figure who presented himself on the appointed day was a tall, robust, and comparatively young Rajput, well set-up, and scrupulously clean. With an air of complete self-assurance, the fakir singled out one of the youthful sceptics from among the audience gathered to witness the performance, and beckoned him with a courteous gesture to come forward.

As the Englishman complied, the Rajput retreated a few paces and, bending down, drew a straight line in the dust with his finger. He then moved backward again, motioning the Englishman to follow. Confidently the young man stepped up to the line, but just as his leg was poised in mid-air, directly over the mark, something seemed to stop him. Perplexed, he lowered his leg and tried the other one ; but with the same result. Some invisible barrier seemed to bar his path.

Meanwhile the fakir stood to one side, his arms folded, smiling gently at the Englishman's efforts. Then it was that the second of the two doubters left his place among the audience, and advanced to cross the line—only to be brought up short in exactly the same manner.

And then an even more amazing thing happened. The straight line marked in the dust slowly began to move backwards upon the two astonished young men. When it reached their toes, they, too, commenced to retreat, step by step, as though some unseen force was pushing them. But their ordeal was not over even yet, for without warning, the line began to extend itself out-

wards, to curve and form a circle round them. In vain they tried to escape from within its compass, but only to be flung back, baffled and exhausted, and more than a little frightened.

At this juncture the ring began to take the offensive ; it deliberately started to close in on its victims. Slowly, as it narrowed, they were huddled closer and closer together towards the centre, until at last they were standing back to back. Still smaller grew the circle, and the two Englishmen, now thoroughly frightened, began to choke and gurgle hoarsely. Even the onlookers, watching with straining eyes, were conscious of an uneasy feeling as they watched the youngsters' panic.

Just when it seemed that the unfortunate sceptics were on the point of choking outright, suddenly, without a word from the motionless fakir, the strain was lifted, whereupon the captives fell forwards on their hands and knees. As for the uncanny ring, it had vanished.

An extremely startling performance of an entirely different nature was witnessed and described by Mr. Charles Bertram some years ago. An Indian fakir threw a little ball of cotton to a woman member of his troupe. The jerk having unrolled about two yards of the cotton, the woman broke off the thread and kept the ball, leaving the end of the thread in the fakir's hand. This end he proceeded to place in his mouth, and sucking in the whole with a deep breath, he started to chew it.

Next, the conjurer borrowed a pocket-knife from Mr. Bertram and, opening it, made as to plunge the point into his own throat. The woman, with some show of excitement, prevented him doing so. The next moment, however, seizing the opportunity while the woman's

back was turned, he deliberately plunged the blade into his stomach. Out of the wound thus made he slowly drew the two yards of cotton, actually pressing out the last few inches, apparently stained with blood, with the aid of the borrowed knife.

Probably this gruesome performance had a perfectly simple and commonplace explanation ; but performed with the skill and air of mystery of which the Indian fakir is such a master, it must have been most impressive in effect.

An even more mysterious trick performed by Indian conjurers is the heating of water by apparently magical means. This feat is performed in various ways. In one of its simplest forms an empty brass bowl is shown to the audience, and then filled with water into which a small piece of ice is thrown, to prove that it is really perfectly cold. A handkerchief, borrowed from one of the spectators, is then thrown over the bowl, some passes are made over it, often accompanied by the beating of a small drum ; and when the handkerchief is removed the water is found to be scalding hot.

Another more spectacular variation of this trick was witnessed by a friend of mine. In this the conjurer was assisted by a small boy. This lad was made to seat himself cross-legged on the ground. A kettle was filled with cold water, and the fakir, taking a handful of straw, placed it on the boy's head and set light to it. Over the flare thus produced the kettle was held, and at the end of the moment which it took for the few wisps of straw to be consumed, the water in the kettle was found to be boiling.

In Oriental conjuring nothing is more mysterious than the way in which the laws of nature are apparently juggled with. A French traveller states that he saw a

fakir in India place a small piece of stick upon the surface of a bowl of water. At a word of command, this stick obediently moved about in any direction, finally defying every canon regulating the behaviour of objects lighter than water by sinking suddenly to the bottom of the bowl.

The rabbit so beloved of Western conjurers also has its equivalents in the East. In one of the most fascinating Oriental variations of this trick, a basket is inverted over a stone, and when the basket is raised, after the usual passes and incantations, the stone has become either a snake or a scorpion.

In a particularly mystifying elaboration of this trick, the snake or scorpion is next thrown into a bag, and the basket replaced on the ground. After a few more passes, the basket being lifted again, out run a number of small birds from beneath it.

Closely allied to, and quite as mystifying as conjuring proper, or sleight of hand, is the art of snake-charming, which is as universally popular among native audiences as among European travellers in India. This art must be of extreme antiquity, if not the very oldest form of conjuring in the East : *vide* the story of the priests who performed before Pharaoh, changing their rods to serpents before his eyes.

An interesting analogy to this Biblical tale is the narrative of a writer on hypnosis who spent some time in Madras, studying the performances of Indian magicians.

" Sitting one morning on the verandah," says this writer, " an aged magician approached and asked permission to perform some of his tricks. As I was in a humour to be amused I told him to go ahead ; whereupon he asked me to loan him the walking-stick I carried. He waved this over his head two or three times, and then exclaimed : ' No good ; too big ; can't do,' and handed

the stick back to me. As I grasped it, it changed into a loathsome, wriggling snake in my hand ; and, of course, I immediately dropped it.

" The conjurer smiled, picked up the reptile by the middle, whirled it around in the air, and handed it back to me. When I refused to take it, he said : ' All right ; no bite,' and behold, it was my stick."

Such stories, unquestionably authentic, could be multiplied indefinitely. But since, as already pointed out, a considerable proportion of the tricks performed by Oriental conjurers—sword-swallowing, fire-eating, leger-demain of all kinds, etc.—are common also to Western lands, there is no point in enlarging upon them in a book devoted to mysteries peculiar to the East.

CHAPTER XV

PHANTOM SHIPS

THAT the old-time sailor-man was notoriously superstitious is easily understandable. The ocean is, without exception, the most stupendous and awe-inspiring of all the works of Nature ; and it is not to be wondered at that the minds of simple men, the majority of whom were almost entirely without " education "—in the conventional sense—should be filled with superstitious awe in the face of many of the (often scientifically explicable) " wonders of the Lord " which are revealed to those who go " down to the sea in ships."

It is on account of this obvious and inevitable fact that it behoves one to tread warily in approaching the vexed question of reputed " mysteries " of the sea—the sea which, particularly in respect of its Asiatic waters, has from the dawn of history provided the imaginative with more strange mysteries than any portion of the earth's land-masses.

The ocean itself remains a mystery, its lower depths an unexplored realm hiding who can say what secrets from the inquiring mind of man ; and out of its seas have come, and will continue to come, many mysteries which seem beyond the capacity of science to resolve.

Gradually, however, our knowledge increases, and the " mysteries " of yesterday become the commonplace facts of to-day. The fish-tailed mermaid, to whose

lures the disappearance of so many deep-drowned mariners has been attributed, becomes the mild-eyed seal; the "sea serpent" which has intrigued and terrified so many generations of men becomes the terrible, but by no means mysterious, giant squid, or leviathan whale; the long-standing mystery of the eels' breeding-place is at last resolved by biological observation. . . .

But certain mysteries of the sea remain, as baffling to the logically-minded sailor of to-day—technical expert, scholar and scientist as the average representative of even the lower-deck now is—as they were to the "shell-back" of a generation ago, whose viewpoint was a mixture of elementary religion, superstition, and inherited tradition. Such a mystery is that of the phantom or ghost ship.

The appearance of this mysterious phenomenon has long been almost as familiar to the landsman as to the hoariest "blue-water" sailor, for it has given rise to some of the finest sea ballads in existence: Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Longfellow's "The Phantom Ship," and "The Ballad of the *Carmilhan*," and the various poetical versions of "The *Flying Dutchman*," to mention but a few.

From these and similar ballads most people know something of the mysterious ships which, from time to time, are reported as having been seen in various waters —ships which are sometimes without helmsman at the wheel or master on the bridge, at others manned by a spectral crew, appearing without warning in the course of some unsuspecting vessel, to disappear as mysteriously, apparently into thin air. The last generation of seamen had not the slightest doubt about the actuality of such spectre vessels; they regarded them with the utmost awe, as undoubted omens of disaster. The modern

sailor . . . well, he would undoubtedly laugh at you, if you brought up the subject, or else would assume his most impressively scientific manner and talk glibly of "mirage" and "refraction."

None the less, if you have talked with all sorts and types of seafaring men under all kinds of conditions, as I have, you will know that many a hard-bitten sailor, with a lifetime of experience of the sea and its ways behind him—and representatives of the upper deck too—has seen strange things that he is not anxious to talk about and for which he has no explanation save that they were so.

The phantom ship is, in fact, as living a problem for the Psychical Research Society as is the human ghost itself. If a dying man or, for that matter, a man in his lifetime, by the power of intense concentration, may accomplish the phenomenon of the projected self and embodied thought—which is the theory most frequently advanced to explain curious psychical appearances, or ghosts—there seems no reason why a whole ship's crew, in the moment of agonised dissolution, should not likewise transmit a message of embodied thought which should include their ship, tackle and all.

A second theory advanced for the explanation of the phenomenon of the ghost ship is the one already referred to—that of optical illusion, which includes the natural phenomena of mirages, refraction, and looming; and in such cases the visual illusion may very well carry with it an aural illusion as well.

Whatever the real explanation of these mysteries, one cannot summarily dismiss them without some thought and consideration when we find such appearances attested to and vouched for by a whole ship's company of officers and men. And the fact remains that such



By courtesy of the British and Foreign Bible Society

NOMADS OF THE GOBI



TYPICAL ORIENTAL CONJURERS

attestation by living men of unblemished probity are extant to-day.

Few people would regard our late King George V, for example, as having been of the type which sees "visions" or allows its imagination to run away with it in the face of occurrences outside its normal experience. In the days before it had fallen to him to be the King of England he knew the sea better, probably, than he knew anything else; and the testimony of such a man is not lightly to be regarded or set aside.

In the diary of the Duke of Clarence and his brother, the then Duke of York (the late King George), written while the royal brothers were sailing in the *Bacchante* in 1881, stands the following entry.

"At 4 a.m. the *Flying Dutchman* crossed our bows. A strange red light, as of a phantom ship all aglow, in the midst of which light the masts, spars, and sails of a brig, 200 yards distant, stood out in strong relief as she came up.

"The outlook man on the forecastle reported her as close on the port bow, where also the officer of the watch from the bridge clearly saw her, as did also the quarter-deck midshipman, who was sent forward at once to the forecastle; but on arriving there no vestige, not any sign whatever, of any material ship was to be seen, either near at hand or right away to the horizon, the night being clear and the sea calm.

"Thirteen persons altogether saw her, but whether it was *Van Dieman* or the *Flying Dutchman*, or who, she must remain unknown. The *Tourmaline* and *Cleopatra*, who were sailing on our starboard bow, flashed to ask whether we had seen the strange red light."

This account, unsensationally couched in clear, businesslike, and matter-of-fact terms as it is, and written

by a man whose integrity none will question, may well stand as a representative description of that extraordinary but undeniable mystery—the phantom ship. Different descriptions may vary in detail, but in essentials the experience of the young Duke is that of every other man or woman who had encountered this inexplicable phenomenon.

If neither scientist nor sailor can offer conclusive evidence to account for the appearance of these mysterious ships the latter has, or had, a wealth of legend on which to fall back; and several of these legends used to be cited as relevant to certain ghost ships which are said to sail in Asiatic waters even to-day. In default of any more convincing explanations of my own I can do no more than quote the traditional stories.

In German sailor-lore is an example which bears a strong affinity to the tale of the Ancient Mariner. This particular vessel is that most terrible of all marine phantoms—a death-ship, the *Libera Nos*. It is said that on hot and breathless nights in both the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the watches of vessels far from the land are horrified by the sight of this phantom ship, glimmering ghostly out of the darkness. The *Libera Nos* is commanded by a Captain Requiem. His mate and crew are skeletons, and the former continually holds an hour-glass before the grisly crew to mark the century they have to serve in each grade.

The ancient legend tells that this ghastly vessel is condemned to sail the seas without a moment's respite, until a Christian crew come aboard her and say Mass for the redemption of her present ghostly one.

That is the story, and there are numerous instances of hard-headed, horny-handed men, who one would have said were without an ounce of imagination in their

make-up, swearing that they have actually encountered the *Libera Nos* with her terrifying captain and crew. I can only leave it at that.

Then there is the terrible tale of Reginald of Falkenberg, who, in a mad fit of jealousy, slew his brother and his brother's wife in the nuptial chamber on their wedding night. In his dying struggles the brother imprinted on the murderer's face the form of his bloody hand. Later, Reginald, tortured by his own conscience, made his way into a neighbouring forest where dwelt a certain hermit, and confessing his terrible crime, sought absolution. But this the hermit felt himself unable to confer. He instructed the murderer, however, to travel northwards until he could find no more land, telling him that there a sign would be given him.

For many months Reginald of Falkenberg travelled towards the north, and at last reached a point where nothing but ocean met his gaze ; and there was a ship, with all sails set, lying at some distance from the shore. From this ship a boat rowed by two men presently came towards him, and with the remark, " We expected thee," one of the men invited him to enter.

On reaching the ship, Reginald was conducted to a cabin, where there were chairs and a table. Here the three men sat down together and commenced to dice for the soul of the murderer.

For six hundred years that grim game has gone on, and will last till the day of doom, so it is said, while the ship sails on without helm or steersman. It is said, moreover, that sailors still occasionally encounter that infernal ship off the coasts of Siberia and that such meetings are still regarded as presage of impending disaster.

There are many versions of the *Flying Dutchman* legend,

but before I describe the one held by those who sail the Asiatic seas I propose to tell, without comment, a story I heard from the lips of one of the most completely "hard-boiled" little Scotsmen it has ever been my fortune to encounter. The story took a good deal of persuasion to extract—the man evidently had no stomach for being called either a liar or a lunatic—and I, personally, am convinced that the narrator honestly believed that he had seen what he described to me. After a lapse of several years I can tell the story only in my own words, but I noted down the facts at the time.

On a certain night in 1921 my informant, who at that time was in command of a small freighter, Liverpool owned, was some nine hours out of Colombo, bound for Singapore. At approximately 11.45 p.m. the officer of the watch reported a red glare bearing down on them on the starboard bow, at a distance of about two miles, and having the appearance of a ship on fire. It was a clear, calm night and from the bridge the ruddy glare was plainly visible. The captain's glasses revealed that this emanated from a four-masted barque, apparently beset by the sailor's most dreaded menace—fire at sea.

But what amazed all who saw it was the fact that, in spite of the conflagration which, to cast so lurid a light, must be raging fiercely, the blazing vessel, under full sail, held steadily to a course which looked likely to pass the watching freighter at dangerously close quarters. The master of that barque must be crazy, the captain told himself; what man in his senses would let a furiously blazing ship run before the wind like that?

Nearer and nearer swept the glowing vessel, and though soon she was near enough for her decks to be clearly visible there was no sign of activity aboard her, such as might have been expected in such circumstances,

nor had she attempted to make any signal of distress. It almost looked as though she had been abandoned and left a travelling menace to every vessel in the Indian Ocean.

Very soon another peculiarity forced itself on the captain's notice. Although the glare emanating from the oncoming four-master showed no sign of abating, there was no vestige of flame about her decks or sides, and the pall of smoke which, in the circumstances, might have been expected to hang over the doomed vessel was conspicuous by its absence.

Onward she swept, crimson from truck to waterline, masts, spars, and tackle outlined clearly in the midst of the lurid light in which she was bathed. It was now apparent that if both vessels held to their present course the barque would pass the other at a distance of some 200 yards to leeward ; and, unwilling to abandon the other to her fate if help was needed, yet bewildered and uncertain of the true circumstances, the captain held on, straining his eyes for some sign from the approaching ship.

Calmly and majestically the ancient barque glided past, so close that the clustered barnacles and streaming weed were visible on her side. And then it was, said my informant, that he became aware of something which caused the hair to prickle on the back of his scalp. Not only was there no sound from the passing vessel, not even the creak of cordage, the rattle of a block, or any murmur about her stem, but there was no heat from the fiery glow which enveloped her. She was a ship of fire which yet did not burn, sailing with deserted decks upon some sinister errand of her own.

One other thing the captain noticed as the mysterious vessel swept past. He swears that momentarily at a

porthole he glimpsed something which looked like a face—a human face with long white beard and wildly glaring eyes. So weird was the apparition that no thought of a human soul in desperate peril entered the captain's mind. He made no movement, issued no word of command, but stood there on the bridge like a man transfixed, while the horror ship sailed silently by and at last was lost in the night. Nor had his conscience ever subsequently troubled him on account of his abandonment of that white-bearded figure to its fate, for it was the figure of no human man—that he was prepared to swear.

Now the version of the *Flying Dutchman* legend current —or at one time current—in Asiatic waters is that of a certain sea captain who entered into a contract with the devil, under the terms of which he was enabled to make phenomenally quick voyages, and thus gained unheard-of popularity with his owners. This captain was a Dutchman named Bernard Fokke, and it is said that he made the voyage from Batavia to Holland in ninety days.

But the unholy contract—there was probably a time limit affixed, although no record of this survived—expired at last; and now the captain is "dreeing his weird" with three of his men, all with long white beards, who wander the Java seas unceasingly, searching for their lost souls.

Just one piece of evidence exists which is relevant to this story. It is said that when the English occupied Java in 1811 they destroyed the statue of a Captain Fokke, which then stood overlooking the Batavia Roads.

And so the problem of the phantom ship remains, one of the most amazing and inexplicable mysteries of Asia's mystery-laden seas. What they are, whence they

come and whither they go no man has ever been able conclusively to explain. But, in face of the existing evidence, it would be either an extremely bold or an excessively bigoted man who would deny that at all events a vivid and convincing impression of such unearthly vessels is, from time to time, conveyed by some mysterious agency to otherwise perfectly sane and logical individuals in these waters.

For, in pursuance of my stated intention of citing only such evidence as I can reasonably claim as being proved to my own satisfaction, the instances quoted here are but an insignificant fraction of the innumerable stories which, in the course of the past few hundred years, have accumulated round this extraordinary marine phenomenon, which is not the least of the many mysteries which, as has been seen, haunt the seas of Asia no less than the Continent itself.

CHAPTER XVI

MYSTERIES OF ASIATIC SEAS

HARDLY less puzzling than the phenomenon of the phantom ship, though probably accountable to more natural causes, is the mystery of disappearing ships. Matter is indestructible, say the scientists, and even if destroyed by fire, a ship at sea cannot burn below the waterline. Yet the history of the sea contains many records of ships, stout vessels stoutly manned, which have disappeared "into thin air," leaving no trace, not so much as a plank or a ship's lifebelt, behind them.

Such cases have occurred in all the waters of the world, and Asiatic seas are no exception to the rule. The following are two typical mysteries of this kind, mysteries which have never yet been solved.

On May 10th, 1854, the good ship *Lady Nugent* sailed from Madras for Rangoon. The *Lady Nugent* had been chartered in the spring of that year as a troopship, for the conveyance of reinforcements to the British forces at Rangoon. In addition to her commander, Captain G. C. Bannerman, three officers and thirty seamen, she had on board her 350 rank and file of the 25th Regiment of the Madras Light Infantry, seven native officers, twenty women and children, together with a number of staff officers, including Lieut.-Colonel Johnstone, Lieutenant and Adjutant Daly, Lieutenant and Quartermaster King, Lieutenant Bamford, and Assistant Surgeon Simpson.

The troopship was of nearly 700 tons burden, and was classed in Lloyd's Register as A 1 for three years. It was, in fact, considered that no sounder ship was then plying in Indian waters ; and it is certain that no single person who watched her depart on that brilliant May morning had the slightest premonition of disaster. Yet the *Lady Nugent* was never seen or heard of again.

About a fortnight after she had sailed a hurricane raged over the Bay of Bengal, but this was not severe enough to prevent the *Pluto*, which belonged to the East India Company's service, and was also *en route* to Rangoon with troops, and several other ships, smaller and less able to cope with the elements than the missing ship, from reaching port safely, though it must be admitted that some of these were badly damaged.

When the *Pluto* reached port and reported the hurricane several cruisers were at once dispatched to look for the *Lady Nugent*, but although they scoured the ocean between Madras and Rangoon, even visiting the various islands scattered in those waters, they found no trace of the troopship whatever. A staunch ship, commanded and manned by capable seamen, she had disappeared as completely as if she had been carried bodily up into the heavens by the force of the storm. And with her had vanished more than four hundred souls.

Now it is only in very rare circumstances that a ship goes to the bottom *in toto*. If driven ashore she is virtually bound to be battered at least partially to pieces before settling down, and even if she sinks in mid-ocean without breaking up, some of the most buoyant fragments of her—a ship's boat, a lifebelt, a piece of furniture—are almost certain to float, and eventually to drift ashore as a clue to the fate of the vessel to which they had belonged.

If the *Lady Nugent* had foundered in the hurricane why did she leave no wreckage behind her like other vessels? It is impossible to believe that a ship of that size, reversing all the laws of nature, could have gone to the bottom with every last detail of her company, equipment, and construction, leaving nothing on the surface beneath which she had sunk.

The mysteries of the sea are many, and we have still much to learn about its ways. There are, however, two solutions which present themselves as possible in such cases as this—they seem, in fact, particularly probable in the present case.

In the year 1854, and for a considerable period both before and after, there was much discontent in the British merchant service, caused chiefly by poor pay and frequent ill-usage of the men by their officers. In consequence mutinies were not uncommon, as, for example, that which occurred in the *Fidelis*, an emigrant ship belonging to Baring Brothers of Liverpool, in the same year.

That mutiny broke out in the *Lady Nugent* is quite possible then, and a fact that considerably strengthens this hypothesis is that she had on board her troops bound for Rangoon, a station to which, in all probability, the men would have been unwilling to be sent. It seems likely enough that the troops joined the seamen in a common rising, seized the ship, and taking her to some remote spot, first plundered and then utterly destroyed her.

An even more likely explanation of the disappearance of this vessel is the possibility of pirates. Later in the summer of that year the merchantman *Cuthbert Young* was captured by Riff pirates, and gentlemen of that calling swarmed in the China Seas and even further

south. The Chinese pirates of those days, whatever he may do to-day, was known to give no quarter. And if the *Lady Nugent* was seized by such a villainous crew, nothing would have been simpler for them than to have destroyed the ship, after plundering it and murdering its company to a man.

But whether either of these explanations of the grim fate of the *Lady Nugent* is the true one we shall never know for certain. The ocean keeps its secrets well, and it may even be that the ill-fated vessel fell a victim of some mysterious menace of the deep of which we as yet know nothing.

Such an instance of the total disappearance of a seaworthy ship is not by any means an isolated case ; the history of Asiatic waters is full of them. But as such instances necessarily bear a close resemblance to one another I shall include here only one further example.

A considerable sensation was caused in this country during the autumn of 1887, when it became known that grave anxiety was felt in the Far East concerning the safety of H.M.S. *Wasp*, a new type of gunboat belonging to the class of warships known technically as " composite." Built for the Government by Sir William Armstrong (afterwards Lord Armstrong) & Co. of Newcastle-on-Tyne, the *Wasp* was a sister ship to the *Rattler*. Her armament consisted of six guns ; her engines were 670 (nominal) and 1000 h.p. (nominal) ; she had a displacement of 670 tons, and carried very little sail, being provided only with yards on her foremast.

The Admiralty thought very highly of this vessel, and regarding her as an extremely useful pattern, they had had six other gunboats constructed on exactly similar lines.

The *Wasp* was commissioned on April 21st, 1887, and on the twenty-first of the following May she left Sheerness under the command of Lieutenant B. J. H. Adamson, for Shanghai, to take the place of the *Midge*, which had been ordered home as unfit for further service. She reached the Malay Peninsula without mishap on September 10th, and sailed from Singapore for Shanghai. She was never seen or heard of again.

The voyage from Singapore to Shanghai was calculated to take the gunboat about sixteen days, and it was expected that she would, according to custom, call at Hong Kong *en route*. It was her failure to do this that first aroused the suspicion that all was not well with her, but at the same time nothing more serious was anticipated, in naval circles, than that she had been damaged in a typhoon that was known to have been raging in the South China Seas, and consequently delayed through having to put in at some port in the Philippine Islands for shelter and repairs.

As the days went by, however, and the *Wasp* still failed to put in an appearance serious alarm was aroused, and a systematic search for her in Chinese waters commenced. But despite the fact that these waters were thoroughly combed by the China fleet their efforts were in vain. Not the slightest trace of the crack gunboat remained. She and all her crew and everything that she had carried aboard her simply vanished.

Officially the *Wasp* was put down as having foundered in a typhoon, somewhere between Singapore and Shanghai. There is one circumstance, however, which, as in the case of the *Lady Nugent*, seems to make this explanaiton extremely improbable. A thorough search of the waters where the disaster was supposed to have occurred failed to reveal the slightest sign of

wreckage. In all the annals of maritime disasters it is the rarest thing to find a genuine case of a vessel, even an ironclad, sinking to the last spar, without leaving any traces behind. Why then should the *Wasp* have been an exception to this rule?

That all had not been well aboard the gunboat on her voyage to take up her first commission may be gathered from the following portion of a letter (published in the *Daily Telegraph*, October 22nd, 1887) which the *Wasp's* commander wrote to his mother some time before he left the Malay peninsula: "I don't care much for my command. Things may turn out better, but with the two inexperienced officers I have to assist me, I am captain, first lieutenant, and navigator all in one. Since leaving England I have never been in bed before daylight at sea."

In view of this piece of evidence, a possible explanation of the disappearance of this vessel is obvious. Many people have refused to believe that the *Wasp* sank in mid-ocean leaving not so much as a boat's plank behind her. It is within the bounds of possibility, however, that during the typhoon the ship got off her track through the inexperience of those handling her and ran ashore on some remote island or piece of the China coast.

Considering the many blunders on the part of their lordships of the Admiralty which naval history reveals —and history as recent as the Great War, when young and hopelessly inexperienced officers were put in charge of large numbers of men and important positions— nothing is more likely than that none of the officers of the *Wasp* other than the commander had any knowledge of Asiatic waters at all.

Once ashore on that pirate-infested coast the vessel

may well have been seized, plundered, and finally destroyed by the rapacious Chinese, who would have thought nothing of coolly doing away with every man aboard her.

That this was the actual fate of H.M.S. *Wasp*—which vessel, oddly enough, was the second man-o'-war of that name to have been lost in a few years, the first, after which she was named, having been totally lost off Tory Island on the west coast of Ireland in 1884—seems probable enough. Yet it is equally likely that there is some other explanation to the mystery. All we know is that her name had gone to add one more to the long list of stout vessels which have found anchorage in the unknown Port of Missing Ships.

If the deep-hued waters of Asia's tepid seas bear many a mystery on their restless bosom—haunted ships, phantom ships, ships that mysteriously vanish without trace—how much more so is this true of their unknown depths.

The diverse creatures of the earth, and of the waters under the earth, have been classified, divided, and subdivided into all their genera and species. Yet still, we know, the silent coral-encrusted depths of the oceans that lap the shores of Asia, hide life which is entirely unknown to the zoologist. These waters are the home of creatures—terrifying monsters, many of them—whose kind and nature remain mysteries even to this day.

Stories of marine monsters—gigantic serpents, the nightmare Kraken, syrens and dragons—have been current ever since man, with the sublime presumption which has raised him above all created life, first dared the might of the unknown ocean in his pitiful frail craft. Such stories were long believed, for to the essentially land-creature that was man in his early days anything

was credible of the monstrous waters that surrounded his familiar home.

Then, with the general spread of ocean travel and the gradual increase of our knowledge of the wonders of nature, scepticism began to creep in. It became more and more the custom to discredit tales of mysteries and marvels as the result of faulty observation and over-active imagination. Yet, on land, as recently as the last century, the okapi—long dismissed as a fabulous beast—was discovered to exist, just as it had been described by travellers; and to-day we recognise as actual facts the existence of more than one long-fabled monster of the deep. We recognise their existence, but beyond that they remain a mystery still. We have at last taken the first step towards wisdom—the realisation of the extent of our ignorance.

Few people would imagine that there is anything very mysterious about the Gulf of Aden, the highroad to the Far East, daily ploughed by the keels of so many matter-of-fact modern vessels—gleaming passenger liners, grimy tramps and cargo boats and long grey men-o'-war. Yet the waters of the heat-blasted gulf hide, or hid until recently, a living mystery in the shape of a most terrifying and unaccountable marine monster.

One blistering morning in January, 1879, the s.s. *Baltimore* was steaming through the gulf on her way to India. Lounging on the poop deck sat a Major (afterwards Colonel) H. W. J. Senior, of the Bengal Staff, returning from home on leave. Suddenly the limp form of the Major stiffened to attention, and in another instant he had darted to the rail and was peering hard out to sea.

There in the shimmering waters of the gulf, abeam of the ship's stern on the starboard side, and about

¼ mile away, was the most extraordinary object Major Senior had ever seen. It was alive, a long black creature, darting rapidly out of the water and splashing in again with a sound distinctly audible, and advancing nearer and nearer at a rapid pace.

In answer to the Major's cry of excitement Dr. C. Hall, the ship's surgeon, who was reading on deck, jumped up in time to see the mysterious creature, as also did a Mrs. Greenfield, one of the passengers on board. By this time it was only about 500 yards off and a little in the rear of the ship, owing to the vessel then steaming at the rate of about 10 knots in a westerly direction.

On approaching the wake of the ship the creature turned a little away and was soon lost to view in the blaze of sunshine reflected in the waves of the sea. "So rapid were its movements," says Major Senior, in a statement signed by himself and the other witnesses of the incident, "when it approached the ship's wake that I seized a telescope, but I could not catch a view of it as it darted rapidly out of the field of the glass before I could see it.

"I was thus prevented from ascertaining whether it had scales or not," continues the account of this eye-witness, "but the best view of the monster obtainable, when it was about three cable lengths away, that is some 500 yards distant, seemed to show that it was without scales. I cannot speak with certainty. Head and neck, about 2 feet in diameter, rose out of the water to a height of about 20 or 30 feet, and the monster opened its jaws wide as it rose and closed them again as it darted forward for a dive, reappearing almost immediately some 100 yards ahead.

Its body was not visible at all, and must have been

some depth under water as the disturbance on the surface was too slight to attract notice, although, occasionally, a slight splash was seen at some distance behind the head. The shape of this head was not unlike the pictures of dragons I have often seen, with a bull-dog appearance on the forehead and eye-brow.

When the monster had drawn its head sufficiently out of the water it let itself drop, as it were like a log of wood, prior to darting forward under water. This motion caused a splash about 15 feet in height on either side of its neck, much in the shape of a pair of wings."

Such a description, detailed, circumstantial, and deliberately matter-of-fact as it is, attested to by a man of education and experience—and of a type not usually highly imaginative—is certainly not capable of being explained away by any of the theories usually advanced in explanation of such marine monsters. No one can suspect Major Senior's mysterious monster of having been merely a whale, a shark, a school of porpoises, or a mass of seaweed. What mystery of the secret depths was thus hinted at to the unsuspecting passengers on board the *Baltimore* that day? What unknown denizen of wavering seaweed forest or coral cave was glimpsed in the Gulf of Aden, only to disappear as mysteriously as it had come?

About seven months later Captain Davidson and the chief officer of the steamship *Kiûshiu-Maru* reported having seen another mysterious creature in Asiatic waters, a monster of gargantuan proportions entirely unknown to zoology. Again, only a portion of the creature was visible above the surface of the sea, but a clear indication of its incredible bulk was given by the fact that the monster was able to seize and drag down no less a beast than a full-grown whale.

The *Kiûshiu-Maru* belonged to the well-known Japanese Mitsu Bish Company, and at 11.15 a.m. on April 5th, 1879, when the vessel was about 9 miles off Cape Satano, Captain Davidson and Mr. McKechnie, his chief officer, saw, at a distance of about ½ mile from the ship, a whale suddenly leap right out of the water. Their interest aroused by so extraordinary a spectacle, they sent below for the glasses, and on the whale again leaping clear of the water saw something holding on to its belly.

Shortly afterwards the whale gave yet another terrific leap into the air and, immediately afterwards, a huge thing, " about the girth of a junk's mast " and of snake-like form, reared itself some 30 feet out of the sea. After remaining erect for about ten seconds it descended again into the water, upper end first, and vanished from sight, together with the whale, which was not seen again.

Captain Davidson made two sketches of this mysterious monster and sent them, together with an account of the incident, to the Editor of the *Graphic*.

Here is another mystery of Asiatic seas which still awaits solution. For the Captain's sketches reveal an object which bears no recognisable resemblance to any marine creature known to science, and his account of its behaviour has mystified all authorities on such subjects.

The year 1879 appears to have been famous for monsters in Asiatic seas, for in the month of October an extraordinary creature was sighted by the officers and crew of H.M.S. *Philomel* in the Gulf of Suez. The incident took place at 5.30 p.m. on October 14th, when the *Philomel* was about 17 miles from Cape Zafarana. When first seen, the creature was about a mile distant, on the port bow. Its snout was raised above the water

to a height of some 15 feet. Every now and then it kept opening its jaw and sending out columns of water from between them. The spread of its jaws, when stretched open to their fullest extent, seemed about 20 feet. The upper jaw was black, the lower one grey round the mouth, but of bright salmon colour underneath, becoming more and more red as it approached the throat.

The inside of this creature's mouth appeared to be grey, with white stripes running parallel to the edges of the jaw. From time to time the monster sank out of sight and rose again, showing part of its back, which was black, and bore a dovetail fin. It kept turning slowly from side to side, every few seconds dipping its head under the waves and then raising it again into the air. Finally it disappeared. What it was no one has ever been able satisfactorily to explain.

What is the solution to the riddle of such monstrous creatures as these, to what species do they belong, what lives do they lead in their mysterious ocean depths? As yet we do not know: the evidence concerning them is too slight. For a tantalising instant Asia twitches aside a corner of the veil of secrecy which has hidden them from man since the beginning of time, then it swings back into place again, and we are little wiser than before.

No known creature now living approximates even reasonably closely to any of the mysterious sea-beasts just described. But in the rocks of the Mesozoic age have been found remains of huge marine lizards, known as plesiosauri and pliosaurus. The appearance of these prehistoric monsters, which are described by Buckland as having had the head of a lizard, the teeth of a crocodile, a neck of enormous length resembling the body of

a serpent, the ribs of a chameleon, and the paddles of a whale, seems to have borne a marked resemblance to what we can piece together about the characteristics of certain present-day monsters of Asiatic seas.

Is it possible that there survive in the pellucid waters of Asia modified descendants of the vanished mammoths of the past? It may be so, but until someone succeeds in capturing one of these modern monsters the truth seems likely to remain a mystery. For the seas of Asia keep their secrets well.

But the marine monsters of Asia take widely different forms, as the following extraordinary report, which appeared in certain of the Indian papers in the summer of 1874, well shows.

"We had left Colombo (the narrative begins) in the steamer *Strathowen*, had rounded Galle, and were well in the bay, with our course laid for Madras, steering over a calm and tranquil sea. About an hour before sunset, on May 10th, we saw on the starboard beam, and about 2 miles off, a small schooner lying becalmed. There was nothing in her appearance or position to excite remark, but, as we came up, I examined her with my binoculars and then noticed between us, but nearer her, a long low swelling lying on the sea, which from its colour and shape I took to be a bank of seaweed.

"As I watched, the mass, hitherto at rest on the quiet sea, was set in motion. It struck the schooner, which visibly reeled and then righted. Immediately afterwards her masts swayed sideways, and with my glass I could clearly discern the enormous mass and the hull of the schooner coalescing. I can think of no better word. Judging from their exclamations, the other gazers must have witnessed the same appearance.

"Almost immediately after the collision and the coalescence the schooner's masts swayed towards us, lower—lower, till the vessel was on her beam ends. She lay there a few seconds and then disappeared, her masts righting as she sank and the main exhibiting a reversed ensign struggling towards the peak.

"A cry of horror arose from the lookers-on, and as if by instinct our ship's head was at once turned towards the scene, which was now marked by the forms of those battling for life, the sole survivors of the pretty little schooner which only twenty minutes before had floated so bravely on the smooth sea."

The mystery of that fantastically horrible scene has never been fully explained, though some further light was certainly thrown on it by the statement subsequently obtained from the captain of the ill-fated schooner, who, with five of his crew, were rescued from a watery grave by the *Strathowen*. The captain's written account, a copy of which also appeared in the papers, ran as follows :

"I was lately skipper of the schooner *Pearl*, 150 tons, as tight a little craft as ever sailed the sea. We were bound from Mauritius for Rangoon, in ballast, to return with wadding, and had put into Galle for water. Three days out we fell becalmed in the bay, lat. 8° 50 mins. N. and long. 84° 5 mins. E. On May 10th about 5 p.m. (I know eight bells had gone) we sighted a two-masted screw steamer on our port quarter, about 5 or 6 miles off.

"Very soon after, as we lay motionless, a great mass rose slowly out of the sea about ½ mile off on our starboard side, and remained spread out and stationary. It looked like a huge black whale, but sloped less, and was a brownish colour. Even at that distance it seemed

much longer than our craft and it seemed to be basking in the sun.

" ' What's that ? ' I sang out to the mate.

" ' Blest if I knows ! Barring its size, colour and shape, it might be a whale,' replied Tom Scott.

" ' And it ain't the sea-serpent,' said one of the crew, ' for he's too round for that crittur.'

" I went into the cabin for my rifle, and as I prepared to fire, Bill Darling, a Newfoundlander, came on deck and looking at the monster exclaimed, putting up his hand : ' Have a care, Master ! That 'ere's a squid and will capsize us if we hurt him.'

" Smiling at the idea, I let fly and hit him, and with that he shook. There was a great ripple all round him, and he began to move.

" ' Out with your axes and knives,' shouted Bill, ' and cut any part of him that comes aboard. Look alive, and Lord help us ! ' Not being aware of the danger, and never having seen or heard of such a monster, I gave no orders, and it was no use touching the helm or ropes to get out of the way.

" By this time three of the crew, Bill included, had found axes and were looking over the ship's side at the advancing monster. We now saw a large oblong mass, moving by jerks just under the surface of the water, and an enormous train following ; the oblong body was at least half the size of the vessel in length, and just as thick ; the wake or train might have been 100 feet long. In the time I have taken to write, the brute struck us, and the ship quivered under its thud ; in another moment monstrous arms, like trees, seized the vessel and she reeled over ; and in another moment the monster was aboard, squeezing in between the masts.

" Bill screamed, ' Slash for your lives ! ' but no slashing was of avail, for the brute, holding on by its arms, slipped its vast body overboard at once and pulled the vessel down with him on her beam ends. We were thrown into the water at once, and, just as I went over, I caught sight of one of the crew, either Bill or Tom Fielding, squashed up between the masts and one of those awful arms. For a few seconds our ship lay on her beam ends, then she filled and went down. Another of the crew must have been sucked down, for you only picked up five. I can't tell who ran up the ensign."

Everybody has heard of big squids dragging down Chinese junks and other quite small craft ; but it is difficult to believe that the vicious monster which boarded and sank a well-found schooner of 150 tons burden, in a calm sea, can have been a squid of any known species. Many people have expressed it as their opinion that the mysterious monster was some hitherto unknown denizen of the deep, one more of the grim secrets of her seas which Asia hugs so jealously to her bosom.

Giant squids or calamaries, at the same time, are known to reach staggering proportions, particularly in the South China Sea, measurements of 150 feet across the body, from the extremity of arm to the tip of another, having been recorded. And yet another mystery of Asiatic seas is suggested by the fact that monsters such as these are sometimes found floating off the Cochin China coast with one or two arms missing, indicating that they have some very powerful enemy in the depths of the ocean. It is a matter of the keenest speculation among the natives what that mighty foe can be.

Some naturalists have attributed such damage to giant calamaries to the sperm whale ; but whales, and

even sharks, have not infrequently been seen in the clutches of calamaries, which pursued them and dragged them down with the greatest of ease. Whatever the creature is, to vanquish the monster calamary it must surely be very much larger and more terrible than any inhabitant of Asiatic waters at present known to us—a mystery monster, in all probability, of a totally unknown species.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MYSTERY OF THE SCHOONER *NESTA*

I CANNOT pretend to explain this final story, nor do I ask anyone to believe it; that is entirely a matter for private judgment. The tale, however, is widely known among the Malay Archipelago, and those who know the East intimately will hesitate to assert that anything, no matter how unlikely, is impossible in the lands where man's body is bathed in eternal splendour, while his mind remains hopelessly steeped in abysmal darkness.

I can only tell the story as I heard it from a white man who had been long enough in the East to distinguish superstition from fact and whose word I have no reason to doubt.

The harsh outlines of the extinct volcano Krakatau rise, black and naked, sheer from the sea at the portals of the Straits of Sunda, between Java and Sumatra. It was here, lying close under the lee of the grim mountain mass, that the white man, whom I shall call Baker, chanced to find the schooner *Nesta*, which he bought so cheaply from the *adipâti*, or headman, of the coast near Java Head.

The *Nesta* was a trim little craft and in first-rate condition. The price asked and given for her was absurdly small, and Baker was full of his luck in having fallen in with her. He had no very high opinion of the morals of the Râjas or headmen of Malayan lands, and told

himself that the *adipâti* had probably come into possession of the schooner by means which would scarcely bear too close a scrutiny. That, however, he considered no affair of his, for men who roam about the Archipelago are not apt to be over-scrupulous, nor do they usually ask awkward questions about such gifts as the gods may send them.

All went well until Baker set about finding a crew to handle his latest acquisition. Then he found that no living soul upon the coast of Java, nor yet among the villages on the Sumatran shore, could be persuaded to set foot aboard her. He wasted weeks in vainly trying to persuade and bribe the people to lend him a hand to sail the schooner up to Tanjong Prîuk, which is the port for Batavia, but at length was forced to abandon the attempt as hopeless.

Not without difficulty, Baker succeeded in forcing the *adipâti* to refund half the purchase money as a guarantee that the schooner would not be resold until he returned to fetch her ; then he set off for Sûlu, where he had a large connection among the divers and fisherfolk.

A couple of months later the white man returned to Krakatau with a gang of yelling Sûlu boys crowding a tiny native craft, and took formal charge of the *Nesta*. The purchase money was paid over, and the schooner began to beat up the straits before a gentle breeze ; and, after putting in at Tanjong Prîuk to refit, and lying for a week or two under the shadow of the great Dutch guardships inside the breakwater, Baker and his native crew set sail for an oyster-bed of which the former alone knew the situation.

I cannot say where this fishing ground is, for my informant hugged his secret closely. Among the islands men pride themselves on having exclusive knowledge

of some out-of-the-way corner that no one else is supposed to have visited. Incidentally, it frequently happens that a dozen men plume themselves on possession of such knowledge in regard to one and the same spot, and until two of them meet there all goes happily enough.

Baker spoke to me of his schooner, in after days, almost with tears in his voice. "She was a daisy to sail, and as pretty as a picture."

Now the custom of Malay pearl-fishers is this: the ship is anchored on the oyster-beds, or as near as possible, and diving takes place from boats twice daily, in the morning and at evening. All boats are manned at these hours, and the Sûlu boys row them out to the point selected for the day's operations. The white man in charge always goes with them to keep an eye on the shells, to physic exhausted divers with brandy or gin, and generally to look after his own interests.

Each of the native divers makes two trips to the bottom a day, bringing up with him two oyster-shells at a time, never more and very rarely less. These men can on occasion dive to a depth of 20 fathoms (120 feet), and though the terrific strain on heart and lungs kills them early, they are a cheery, devil-may-care set of ruffians as a rule.

Baker and his schooner reached the oyster-bed in safety, and work was begun on the following morning. The shells were lying "as thick as mites in a cheese," and three fine pearls were obtained on the first day—which is more than any pearl-fisher living has any right to hope for. Thus it was that Baker retired early to his bunk on that first night, and dreamt of great wealth and an honoured old age.

The white man had not slept very long, however,

before he was awakened by his Malay boatswain standing over him. "What ails thee?" demanded Baker in Malay. "The order hath come to Abu," was the reply. "When did he die?" asked Baker, who understood the Malay idiom. "I know not, Tûan," said the boatswain, "I found him lying face downwards on the deck, a little abaft the mainmast. He died startled (suddenly), and no man was at hand to watch him at his death."

"Come let us see," said Baker, rolling off his bunk, and together they went to view the body by the light of a ship's lantern.

Abu lay dead, naked to the waist, with outstretched arms, and palms lying flat upon the deck. Half a dozen Sûlu boys stood in a frightened group at a little distance from the body, talking together in low, uneasy whispers.

Baker turned the body over on its back, and put his hand on the dead man's breast. He noted that the face had been badly bruised by the boards of the deck, which it had struck when Abu fell. Apparently the man, who in his lifetime had appeared a strong and healthy fellow, had a weak heart, and the diving had proved too great a strain for him.

Baker said as much to the boatswain, but the latter did not seem convinced. "Has the Tûan noticed this?" he asked, turning the body over as he spoke, and pointing to a minute black stain on the skin, just below the left shoulder-blade. The white man examined the spot carefully. "It is a birth-mark," he said. "Perhaps," said the boatswain doubtfully, "but in all the years that I have seen Abu stripped for the diving never have I remarked the said birth-mark." "Nor I," added Baker, "but if it is not a birth-mark, what then may it be?" "God alone knows, Tûan," replied the boatswain piously, "but I have heard tell of spirits

who scar their victims, leaving just such a mark as we see."

Baker was righteously indignant ; he felt that he did well to be angry, for superstition is an unseemly thing, more especially when it tends to prevent a man from working one of the best oyster-beds in the whole of the Malay Archipelago. The boatswain took all the hard things said to him with the utmost composure ; but it was not difficult to see that the Sûlu boys, who had stood listening to all that had passed, felt that reason was on his side.

Diving was resumed on the following morning, but Baker noticed that some of the younger men failed to reach the bottom, apparently lacking the nerve required for the violent effort, while both old and young seemed sullen and uneasy, The white men did not like these symptoms at all, for every wise pearler knows that much depends on his divers being kept in good spirits.

Accordingly, when night had fallen, putting an end to the labours of the day, Baker did his best to rouse his people by organising a dance on the open space abaft the mainmast. Drums and gongs were produced, and the Sûlu boys thumped and clanged them vigorously, while one of their number blew the shrill *sĕrûnai*, whose note resembles that of a demented bag-pipe. Then some stood up and danced nimbly, and all lifted up their voices in discordant song.

Men of the Malayan race are gifted with exceptionally volatile natures, easily cast down and as easily lifted up again ; and soon the people on the deck of the schooner were laughing, singing, and bandying jests, each man competing eagerly for his turn to rise up and dance. Their faces, with flashing eyes and teeth showing white through gums stained dark red with areca-nut, looked

as merry and as happy in the flare of the ship's lanterns as though death and the fear of death were thoughts to which they were utter strangers.

Baker heaved a sigh of relief, and shortly before midnight stole away to his cabin and set about the task of opening the oyster-shells collected that day. Then suddenly a bewildering hubbub broke out on deck. The drums and gongs were silenced, the sound of the *sĕrûnai* died away in one expiring wail, the lusty song ceased, and the noises that replaced it were yells and screams of terror, mingled with the pattering of naked feet scurrying along the deck.

Seizing a revolver, Baker rushed on deck. He found the boatswain cowering against the bulwarks, his teeth chattering like castanets and his body bathed in a cold sweat. The man was too spent with fear to do more than moan, but at last his master succeeded in shaking him into articulate speech.

"Behold!" gasped the boatswain, and with a hand that trembled violently he pointed to an object a little abaft the mainmast.

Baker walked up to the object indicated and found that it was the body of one of his people, a youngster named Intan. He lay quite dead in the same attitude as that in which Abu's body had lain upon the previous night; and on his back, a little below the shoulder-blade, was a small dark stain upon the skin.

Picking up the body, the white man carried it to his cabin where he laid it gently on the bunk. In the bright light of the lamp he could see Intan's face clearly for the first time. The nose and forehead were cut and bruised by the fall upon the deck, but the features still wore fixed upon them the expression they had borne at the moment of death. The eyes were starting from

their sockets, the mouth seemed open in a soundless scream, and the whole face told a tale of abject, masterless terror—fear such as it is given to few to experience, and to fewer still to survive.

Baker tried hard to persuade himself that the Sûlu boy's heart had been rotten and that death had been due to natural causes, but with that strange mark below the shoulder-blade, before his eyes, he failed to convince even himself.

While he was still pondering upon the mystery the boatswain and the Mandor, or headman, of the Sûlu divers appeared at the cabin door and begged to have speech with Baker. They spoke in the name of all on board, and entreated the white man to set sail that very night and shape a course for the nearest land.

"This ship is the abode of devils," said the boatswain, "of evil spirits that war with men; and in the name of Allah we pray thee to depart from this place and to abandon this woeful ship.

"Behold, as we sat singing, but an hour ago, singing and dancing with our hearts at ease, of a sudden it was laid upon us to gaze upwards, and lo, we spied an aged man climbing out of the rigging of the mainmast. Out of the black darkness above the reach of the lantern light he came, climbing slowly after the manner of the aged, and indeed he was well stricken in years. His body from the belt upwards was naked and bare, and the skin was creased and wrinkled like the inner skin of a durian. He was clad in a yellow waist-skirt looped about his middle, and his fighting drawers were also yellow. It is the colour of the Spirits as the Tûan knows.

"This ancient one had a long dagger, a *kris chĕrita*, of many tens of waves to its blade, and he carried it crosswise in his teeth as he climbed. We who looked

upon him were stricken with a great fear, so that we might not stir hand or foot; and presently he descended on to the deck. Then we fled screaming, but He of the Long Dagger pursued Intan, and smote him upon the back as he ran, so that he died. Thereafter the Spirit swarmed back up the mast and disappeared into the darkness.

"Many beheld this thing, Tûan; it is not the talk of a child. And we who saw the evil thing cannot endure to dwell longer within this haunted ship."

Baker did not know what to make of it for he himself was anything but inclined to superstition. His influence with his people was great, and their faith in him was as the faith of little children in their parents. Therefore he made a pact with his crew, by which he promised to sail for the nearest land if anything untoward should happen on the following night; and he further promised to watch with them and to protect them from the spirit. For, after the trouble he had had in getting his crew there, Baker was very loth to be frightened by any ghost on earth into abandoning so promising a fishing-ground.

No diving was done on the following day, for the men had no heart for the effort, and though an attempt was made in the morning it was speedily abandoned as useless. Night found the crew huddled together on deck, a little forward of the mainmast, with the white man sitting nearest to that dreaded spot. Baker tried to induce the natives to keep up their hearts by thumping gongs, as on the previous night. But the songs died down in the singers' throats, the *sĕrûnai* wailed discordantly and then ceased, and as the hour of danger approached a dead silence of fear descended upon the crowd of men, huddled one against another for the sake of company on the dimly lighted deck.

Shortly after midnight a tremor ran through the crew and half a dozen men started to their feet, all gazing upwards with craning necks into the rigging. Baker could hear the sighing of the wind in the cordage, the creaking of a rope against the mast, and the hard breathing of the frightened crew; but though he strained his eyes to the utmost nothing at all could he see.

It made his flesh creep queerly, Baker told me afterwards, as he stood there, while the night wind sighed gently overhead and the little lazy ripple broke against the ship's side, to watch the frightened faces of the Malays gazing with protruding eyes at something that he could not see—something in the rigging of the mainmast, whose descent towards the deck they seemed to watch.

"It is He of the Long Dagger!" whispered a voice that sounded harsh and strange. The white man would never have recognised it as that of his boatswain if he had not seen the man's lips moving. "Where, where?" he demanded eagerly; but no one heeded him, all seeming spell-bound by the creeping invisible thing they watched in agony.

The grating tones of Baker's voice died away and the little quiet noises of the night alone broke the stillness of the heavy air. Sea and sky seemed to wait alike for a catastrophe, and the fear of death—and worse than death—lay heavy on the watchers.

Suddenly the awful silence was broken by a tumult of yells and screams, such sounds as the human voice can produce only when men are mad with terror. The groups behind the white man broke like a herd of startled deer, the Malays fleeing in every direction, shrieking their terror of some unseen pursuer. And

still Baker could see nothing. He turned to watch his people in their mad flight, and as he did so a chill breath, such as often whispers over the surface of the tropic sea during the quiet night-time, seemed to fan his cheek and pass him by.

The next instant, the headman of the divers, who was running swiftly along the deck, his breath coming in hard short gasps, suddenly threw up his arms, his hands extended widely, and with a fearful yell fell prone upon the deck, his face striking the planking with a heavy, sickening thud. Baker ran to him and lifted the Malay across his knee ; but the headman was dead, and below the left shoulder-blade the strange dark stain that the boatswain had called the scar of the Spirits was plainly to be seen.

Before dawn the schooner was under way, heading for the nearest land. The Sûlu boys slunk about the deck, or sat huddled up against the bulwarks, talking together in scared whispers. The sun shone brightly on the dancing waves, and the schooner leaped joyously through them to the song of the wind in the rigging and the ripple of the forefoot through the water. But Nature alone was gay and well pleased that day, for the *Nesta* carried none but heavy hearts and souls on which lay the fear of an awful dread.

Early in the afternoon land was sighted, and as soon as the trunks of the coco-nut trees could be clearly distinguished below the dancing palm-fronds, first one and then another of the Sûlu boys leaped upon the bulwarks and plunged headlong into the sea. Baker could do nothing to stay them for they were mad with fear. Only the old Malay boatswain remained at his side, and even his fidelity could not face the prospect of another night spent aboard that devil's ship. Between

them the two men managed to lower a boat, and taking such articles of value as were capable of being removed, they too turned their faces shorewards.

During the night a wind from off the shore sprang up and carried the schooner *Nesta* away with it. By dawn she had vanished, and so far as I am aware she has never been heard of since.

I have said that I cannot pretend to explain these happenings, nor, unfortunately, have I been able to trace any information at all about the former history of the *Nesta*. Possibly, if one knew the whole of the facts, some explanation might be found ; but as it is this extraordinary story seems likely to add one more to the many unsolved mysteries of Asiatic seas.

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INDEX

A

Abdals, 153
Adam, 80, 143
Adam's Peak, 170
Aden, Gulf of, 251, 255
Ad ibn Shaddad, 148
Afghanistan, 57
Africa, 74, 75, 81
 Central, 99, 101
 South, 111
Aghri Dagh, 158
Aiome pygmies, 99–102, 106
Albinos, 96
Aleppo, 158
Amazon, River, 75
Amazons, 85, 90, 96
America, movement of, 72
 Central, 206
 North, 212
 South, 72, 75
Angkor Thom, 195–212
ʿAmr ibn El ʿAas, 155
Anastas, Charles, 82
Animal food, abstinence from, 65
Ansaireh, 58
Antarctica, 75
Ararat, Mt., 158, 161
Arab, traders, 77, 79
Arabia, 141, 146, 147, 149
Arabs, pre-Islamic, 143
Araxes, Valley, 159
Arch-Hellenis, 74
Ark, the, 158
Armenia, 158, 160
Armenians, 158, 160, 162
Armstrong, Sir William, Co., 251
Aroe Is., 85
Aru Is., 85
Ascetics, 20
Asia, Central, 213, 222
 Minor, 54, 111, 150, 152, 159
Assam, 127, 168
Assassins, 53, 54, 149
Astarte, worship of, 150
Astronomical Society, Royal, the, 71
Atamut, 53
Atemble, 100, 101
Atlantic Ocean, 71, 72
Atlantis, 70
Aubar, 147
Australasia, 75
Australia, 13, 99
Ayuthia, 173

B

Bacchante, the, 241
Baikal, Lake, 160
Bailey, 126
Baker, Sir Samuel, 107
Balharas, 97
Ballad of the Carmilhan, the, 239
Baltimore, the, 255, 257
Bamboo, 22
Bangkok, 175
Bani ʿUmazza, 155
Bannerman, Capt. C. G., 248
Banyan, 80
Bârau-bârau, thrush, 27
Baring Brothers, 250
Batavia, 179, 246
Ba-t'ang, 124
Bathing, ceremonial, 19, 22, 65

Bavaria, Duke of, 56
Bayon, of Angkor, 202
Behring Straits, 160
Bengal, 44
 Bay of, 74, 249
Bell, Gertrude, 150
Bertram, Charles, 234
Bethlehem, 160
Black Dragon, Society of, 64
 Magic, 42, 47, 116
 Sea, 47, 86, 160
 Stone, the Holy, of Meccah, 145
Blood, Fraternity of, the, 73
 sacrifice, 67
Bock, Carl, 175
Bohun Upas, tree, 178
Borneo, 91, 103, 104
Bourbon Island, 77
Boynot, 82
Brahma, 67
Brahmaputra, River, 126–129
Brahmins, 67, 175, 229, 231
Brazil, 74
Britain, movement of, 72
 part of Continent, 71
British Museum, 206
Bruce, 189
Bryce, 163
Buccaneers, 81
Buckland, 259
Buddha, 105, 122, 220, 224
Bulgaria, 18
Burma, 44, 106, 168, 206, 209
Bussora, 96

C

Cairo, 152
Calamaries, 263
Cambodia, 195, 196, 200, 203
Campbell, D. M., 179
Cannibalism, 17
Canton, 60
Cape of Good Hope, 160
Capucin, 80
Cardamom Hills, 91
Caroline Islands, 209
Carvings, at Angkor, 200–203
 at Lop-nor, 220
Caspian Sea, 213
Caucasus, 47
Ceylon, 166, 168, 170
"C. H.," surgeon, 179
Chagos Island, 77
Chaldean, worship of stars, 160
Chang Tang, 123
Channel, English, 71
Chasm, the Great, 160, 162
Cheesman, Major, 146
Ch'eng Kuang Tien, 135
China, 46, 59, 104, 105, 106, 111, 118, 124, 130, 132, 139, 140, 206, 213, 225
 Seas, 250, 252, 263
Chinese City, the, of Peking, 133
 maps, ancient, 215
 miners, 24
Chingis Khan, 214
Chins, 231
Chirringan, 91, 95
Chittagong Hills, 171
Chos-Khor, 119
Chota-Nagpur, 44
Chulalonkorn, King of Siam, 175
Churchward, James, 205
Chu-Yang-chang, 133
Cicada, 27
Clarence, Duke of, 241
Cleopatra, the, 241
Clifford, Sir Hugh, 24, 37, 87, 88
Coales, Oliver, 124
Coal Hill, the, 137, 138
Cochin China, 30, 263
Coco-de-mer, 77, 80
Codex Cortesianus, 206
Coimbatore, 232
Colombo, 244, 260
Colonial Office, the, 17
Commodus, the Emperor, 59
Conjuring, 226–236
Conrad of Montferrat, 56
Convent of St. Jacob, 160

Cordyæans, the Mountain of, 158
Coudent, 82
Creoles, 76
Criminals, Javan, treatment of, 180
Crocodiles, 80, 99
Crusades, the, 56
Curieuse Island, 77, 82
Curse, on bow, 13
Cuthbert Young, the, 250

D

Dacoits, 66
Dai Nippon Kokusui, 64
Daily Telegraph, The, 253
Dalai Lama, 118, 119, 120, 179, 186
Damascus, 57, 155
Dancing grounds, of elephants, 171
Darjeeling, 115, 188
David-Neel, Mme, 116, 117
Davidson, Capt., 257
Dayaks, 103
Death penalty, 68
"Death of a Thousand Cuts," 61
Demonology, 24
Dempu volcano, 46
Den, Baron, 63
Dennys, 30
Dervishes, 152–155
Desert and the Sown, The, 150
Devotees, 18, 21
Dragon, of China, the sacred, 138
 Throne, the, 132
 Town, the, 223
Drugs, 18, 53
Druses, 57
Durazi, 57
Dutch, at Matura, 166
 East India Company, 178
 New Guinea, 101
Dyherenfurth, Himalayan expedition, 114, 115

E

Earthworm, 27
East India Company, the, 249
Easter Island, 205
Ectoplasm, 21
Egland, pirate, 82
Egypt, 206
Elephants, 164–177
Empty Quarter, the, 146–149
Enders, Gordon B., 121
English Channel, the, 71
Erivan, 162
Europe, 223
Eve, 80
Everest, Mount, 184–194

F

Faith, 23
 act of, 18, 66
Fakir, 34, 35, 229, 230, 233–236
Falkenberg, Reginald of, 243
Falkland Is., 75
Fanatics, 23
Fascism, in Japan, 64
Federated Malay States, 86
Fidelis, the, 250
Fiji Is., 20
Fire-walking, 18–21
Fish, migration of, 71
Flood, the, 73
Flying Dutchman, the, 239, 241, 243
Foerch, Dr., 178
Fokke, Bernard, 246
Folklore of China, 30
Footstep, the People of the, 155
Forth, River, 71
Fox-terrier, 33
France, 196
Fraternity of Blood, the, 63
Frederick II, nephew of, 56
Frigate Island, 81
Fuchow, native of, 61
Fu-Kao, 122
Fustat, 155

G

Galle, 260
Garrows, 44
Gartok, 112
Gases, poisonous, 183
Gate of Resplendent Brilliancy, the, 139
Gautama, the, 105, 172
Genesis, Book of, 73, 158, 159
Geological Society, Royal, the, 71
George V, King, 241
Ghosts, 42
Gibraltar, 160
Goa, 97
Gobi Desert, wandering lake of, 213–224
Gohei, 22
Gold, Tibetan, 109–113
Gomchens, 116
Gondwanaland, 74, 76
Gordon, General, 78
Graphic, The, 258
Greece, 206, 213
Greenland, 72
 Sea, 73
Greenwich Observatory, 71

H

Hadhr al Maut, 148
Haji Äli, 37
Hajj, the, 142
 performed by Europeans, 144
Hajji, 143, 145
Hakem, 57
Hallas, Gledhill, 12
Han dynasty, 223
Hashish, 53
Hassan-i-Sabbah, 53
Haunted bow, 15
 room, 14
 trees, 24
Hedin, Sven, 124, 216, 224
Hermits, Tibetan, 116
Herodotus, 99, 109
Hill-men, of India, 91
Himalayas, 107, 111
Hindus, 44
Hiranuma, Baron, 64
Histoire et Description des Isles Seychelles, 82
Hiung-nu, 223
Holland, 246
Homer, 99
Hong Kong, 252
Hook-swinging, 18
Hookah, 31
Hud, Prophet, the, 148
Hui-Sai, 173
Hurricanes, 80
Hutuketu, 118
Hypnotism, 225, 228, 236

I

Ibn Batuta, 96, 97
Ibrahim ben Adham, 156
Ihering, 74
Ihram, the, 143
Illumined, the, 157
Imperial City, the, 133, 134
 Guard, 133
India, 20, 24, 44, 96, 97, 111, 193, 206, 213
 Central, 30
 Secret Societies in, 66
 Southern, 90, 168, 227, 232
Indian Civil Service, 228
 Ocean, 245
 Ocean, Lost Continent of, 70–79
 Indian Survey, the, 109
Indians, North American, 206
Indo-China, 84, 196, 197
Indra, 172
Inukai, Premier, 63
Ireland, 71
Irvine, A., 188–191

Ishrakiyya, the, 157
Islam, 141, 144
Ismailis, 149, 150

J

Jacob, St., Valley of, 162
Jade Emperor, 137
 Fountain, 131
Jalal ud-Din ar-Rumi, 152
Japan, 18, 19, 44, 206
 Emperor of, 63
 Secret Societies of, 63
Java, 37, 232, 246, 265
 Head, 265
 mysterious valley of, 178–183
 Secret Societies in, 60
Java Past and Present, 179
Jesuit narratives, 30
Jesuits, 133
Jiddah, 141
Jinns, 146, 148
Jorz, 97
Josephus, 158
Joss-sticks, Chinese, 25
Jourdain, John, 78
Jugglers, Indian, 227, 228
Jungle Books, Kipling's, 171

K

Kaaba, the, 143, 144, 145
Kalee, 66
Kanagi, 19
Kanda, 18
Karachi, 34
Kelly, Edward, 34
Kennedy, 97
Kenworthy, Commander, 98
Khan, the Great, 216
Khiran, 147
Khmers, 197, 202, 204, 211
Khong-po, 119, 120
Kinta Valley, 37
Kinthup, 126
Kitawa Is., 17
Kiushiu-Maru, 257, 258
Koh-i-Huh, 158
Koku Ryukai, Society of, 64
Kokuhousa, Society of, 64
Kola Peninsula, Black Magic in, 48
Koran, 31
Korbu Mountain, 86, 88
Korinchi, 36, 46
Korla, 216
Krakatau, 265
Kris, 178, 271
Kublai Khan, 131, 133
Kumageya, tribe, 17
Kum-daria, 217
Kung, Prince, 132
Kurds, 162
Kurruk-tagh, 221
Kurruk-daria, 217

L

Ladrone Is., 205
Lady Nugent, the, 248
Lake, Wandering, of Gobi, 213–224
Lama, 107, 111, 112, 120, 126, 153, 193
 Mongolian Grand, 118
 Panchan, 118, 121
Lamaism, 112, 122
Lamongang Mountain, 46
" Land of the West, the," 206
Lao States, 174
Larena tribe, 17
le Tasseur, Olivier, 82
Lemmings, 72
Lemuria, 74, 75, 78
Lemurs, 74
Levitation, 228–232
 photograph of, 251

Lhasa, 119, 127, 131, 132
 Record, 206
Liaos, 130
Libera Nos, the, 242
Li-liang, 124
Lion-dogs, 122
Lodoices sechellarum, 77, 81
London, 61
 Naval Treaty, 63
Lop Desert, 215, 216
Lop-men, 216
Lou-lan, 223
Lucknow, 228
Lung-gom, 116–118
Lycocanthropy, exorcism of, 49
 initiation in, 48

M

Madagascar, 74, 76
Madras, 236, 248, 260
 Light Infantry, 25th Regiment of, 248
Magi, the, 68
Magic, 30, 42, 43, 226
Mahé Island, 78–80
Malay Archipelago, 209
 Peninsula, 96, 124, 252, 265
Malaya, 24, 36
Malays, 86, 87, 89
Mallory, G. L., 188–191
Man, Isle of, 12
Manaiea, 17
Manali, 75
Manchu Emperor, 140
Manchus, 131, 132
Mangaia Is., 205
Mangroves, 80
Manning, Thomas, 120, 121
Mantra, 34
Maps, ancient Chinese, 215
Marco Polo, 130, 135, 216
Marianna Is., 205
Martyrs, 65
Maskelyne, 226
Massis Ljarn, 158
Materialism, 23
Matsuri, 21
Matura, 166
Mauritius, 77–81, 201
Mawlawis, 152
Maya book, 206
Meccah, 131, 141–146, 155
Medicine men, 30
Mediums, professional, 30, 35
Mekong River, 123–125, 195
Mēnangkâbaus, 37
Mental concentration, creates heat, 115
Mērbau tree, 25
Mermaids, 239
Mesmerism, 91, 95, 229, 231
Mesozoic Age, 259
Mexico, 206
Midge, the, 252
Milarespa, 116
Ming dynasty, 59
Mings, 131, 138
Miracle of Yubana ordeal, 22, 23
 of gilded corpse, 113
Miswar ibn Machramah, 156
Mithraics, 58
Mithras, 58
Mitsu Bish Company, the, 258
Mitsubishi Bank, Baron Den of, 63
Mohammed, 216
Mohammedans, 30
Monasteries, Tibetan, 110–114
Mongolia, 131
Mongolian Grand Lama, 118
Mongols, 131, 132, 222
Monkey, poltergeist, 30
 seamang, 27
Morshead, 126
Mosque, the Great, of Meccah, 144
Mother Worship, 150
Mountain of Noah, the, 158
Moyne, Lord, 99–102
Mu, Land of, 205–211

Mudevars, 91, 94, 95
Mundas, 44
Mur Ussu, River, 123
Musse, Valley of, 54

N

Naacal tablets, 205, 206, 209, 211
Nachung Chos Gyong Oracle, 119
Nag-Chu, the, 123
Nagas, 210, 211
Narana, High Priest, 206
Negroes, 76
Neolithic Man, 215
Nepal, 104
Nesta, the, 265–275
New Guinea, 13, 99, 100, 103, 106
 Administrator of, 17
New York, 61
New Zealand, 18
Nicholas, Czar, 162
Noah, 73, 158, 159
 Mountain of, the, 158
North Sea, 71
Nosairis, 150, 151
Nottingham, Mr. Gledhill Hallas of, 12

O

Odell, 190
Odoric, Friar, 135, 136
Old Man of the Mountains, the, 53
Ontaké, 18, 22
Oracle, Tibetan State, 119
Orang Outan, 20, 21

P

Pacific Ocean, 77, 205
Pahang, 24, 37, 174
Painful Mountain, the, 158
Palembang, volcano in, 46
Panape Is., 205
Panchan Lama, 118, 121
Pandanus, 80
Paper Money, 25
Papua, pygmies in, 103
Parsees, 68
" Passport to Heaven," 121
Patagonia, 75
Pearl, the, 261
Pearl fishing, 267
Pei-Hai, 131
Peking, 130–140, 214, 216
 Gazette, 139
Pelin Kao, Society of, 59
Pemakochung, monastery of, 126, 127
People of the Footstep, the, 155
Perak, 24, 37, 84
Persia, 53, 133, 213
 Arab conquerors of, 68
 Assassins in, 57
 Magi in, 68
 Mithraics in, 58
Persian Gulf, 79
Persians, 158, 162
Phallic worship, 67
Phantom Ships, 238–247
Phantoms, 42
Philby, H. St. John, 146, 147, 149
Philippine Is., 252
Philomel, the, 258
Philosopher's Stone, the, 157
Philosophy of Illumination, the, 157
Photography, Indian failure, 226
 of rope trick, 225, 226
 of levitation, 251
Phra Narai, King of Siam, 173
Pillai-mansen, 90–96
Pirates, 81, 82, 250
Plesiosauri, 259
Pliosaurus, 259
Pluto, the, 249
Pobun Peary, 166
Poland, secret societies in, 66

Poltergeist, 29–35
Polynesia, 20
Port St. Mary, 13
Portuguese, at Matura, 166
 charts, 76
 explorers, 77
Potala, the, 119
Praslin Is., 77, 79, 80
 pirates in, 81, 82
Prayer-wheels, Tibetan, 105
Prjevalsky, General, 124, 215, 216
Psychical Research, Society of, 34, 42
Pygmies, 99–104

Q

Quran, 149, 150, 156

R

Rafiqs, 54
Ram Pershad, 227, 228
Ramayana, the, 206
Ramu, River, 100
Rangoon, 248, 250, 261
Rattler, the, 251
Rawas, 37
Rawlinson, Sir H., 110
Raymond of Tripoli, Count, 56
Red Sea, 53, 79, 141
Reinaud, 96
Reineggs, 161
Relation des Voyages, 96
Religion, 18
Religious feast, 34
 offerings, 24, 25, 26
Requiem, Capt., 242
Reunion Is., 80
Rhine, River, 71
Richard Cœur de Lion, 56
Richtofen, Baron von, 215, 216
Rifa'is, 152, 155
Riff pirates, 250
Rime of the Ancient Mariner, The, 239
Rites, religious, 18
Rivers, of Tibet, 123–129
Robertson, Col., 166
Rockhill, 124
Rodriguez Is., 80
Rome, Imperial Court of, 216
Rongbuk glacier, 193
Rope trick, the Indian, 225–228
Rosenberg, Baroness, 91
Royal Astronomical Society, 71
 Geological Society, 71
Rub'al Khali, the, 147
Russia-in-Asia, 47
Ruttledge, Hugh, 194

S

Sachow, 216
Sacrifice, human, 67
Sadhu, 34
Sa'adis, 152, 155
Saladin, 157
Salt, 19, 22
Salween, River, 123, 124, 125
Samarang, 232
Samourism, 64
Sanderson, 167
San Francisco, 61
Sanskrit, writings, 204
Satano, Cape, 258
Sclater, Philip Lutley, 74
Scotland, 71
Sea Palaces, of Peking, 131
Sea serpents, 239, 255–264
Seamang monkey, 27
Semang Malays, 86, 87
Senior, Major H. W. J., 255–257
Sēpûteh, 24
Serpent, Sea, 239, 255–264
 Seven-headed, 210

Sĕrûnai, 272
Seychelles Archipelago, 76–83
Shan States, 104, 105
Shanghai, 252
Sheerness, 252
Shetland Is., 71
Shinshukyo, 18, 21
 Chief Priest of, 23
Shinto, 18
 faith, 23
Shipton, Eric, 191, 193
Siam, 172–177
 Phra Narai, King of, 173
Siberia, 43, 47, 48, 111, 243
Silk Route, the, 216
Simla, 225
Sinanthropus Pekinensis, 214, 215
Singapore, 176, 244, 252
 Singapore Chronicle, 103
Singbhum, 44
Siva, 67
Sleight of hand, 226
Slim Valley, the, 37
Smythe, Frank, 186–188
Snake-charming, 236
Sorcery, 17, 18
South Desert, of Arabia, the, 146, 147
South Sea Is., 18, 204, 206, 208
Sperm whale, 263
Spike-sitting, 18
Spirits, tree, 24–29
Spiritualism, 21
Springbok, 72
Spring-gun, 40
Squids, 263
St. Jacob, Valley of, 162
Stanmore, Lord, 20
Stanovoi Mountains, Black Magic in, 48
Stones, walking, 148
Strabolgi, Lord, 98
Straits Settlements, 59
Strathowen, the, 260, 261
Street of Everyday Life, the, 138
Sufism, 156, 157
Suhrawardy, Sheikh, 157, 158
Sui-fu, 124
Sulu, 266
Sumatra, 36, 37, 44, 91, 265
 Secret Societies in, 60
Sun cult, 65
Sunda, Straits of, 265
Super-physical, intercourse with the, 47
Superstition, 37
Suspension of life, temporary, 115
Suss, 74
Sydney, 16
Syria, 149, 150
 Assassins in, 67
Szetchuanese, forest, 117

T

Tang-la, the, 123, 124
Ta Kao Hsuan Tien, 136
Tanjong Priuk, 266
Tarim, River, 215, 217
Tartar City, 133
Tartars, 133, 158, 162
Tashi Lama, 118
Tashilhumpo, 118
Tasmania, 75
Toomai of the Elephants, 171
Toras, 216
Tory Is., 254
Tourmaline, the, 241
Trance, auto-hypnotic, 115
Trapa, 116
Travancore, 70, 95
Tree-felling, 25
Troana MS., 206
Trobriand Is., 13, 17
Tsang-po, 126, 127
Turkestan, East, 216, 222
Turks, 158, 162, 223
Turpen, 221
Tzu-t'an, 135

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